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Congress gets ₹1,800 cr IT notice

Cong says BJP indulging in 'tax terrorism' to cripple the party ahead of polls

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Congress on Friday said it has received fresh notices from the Income Tax (IT) Department, asking it to pay Rs 1,823.08 crore.

Congress alleged that BJP is in "serious violation" of income-tax laws for which authorities should raise a demand of more than Rs 4,600 crore from the saffron party.

Congress also accused the ruling BJP of indulging in "tax terrorism" to financially cripple the opposition party ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here along with Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh, party treasurer Ajay Maken said parties have to fill up a proforma of Form 24A, in which two basic and important pieces of information have to be furnished -- the names and addresses of their donors.

"We have analysed all the submissions of the BJP to Election Commission (EC). The party has faltered every year," Maken claimed.

Ramesh alleged that through the "electoral bonds scam", BJP has collected Rs 8,200 crore and used the route of "pre-paid, post-paid, post-raid bribes and shell companies".

"Efforts are being made to financially cripple the Congress, but we are not going to be cowed down," Ramesh said.

He asserted that the Congress's campaign for the upcoming parliamentary polls will continue and the party will take its guarantees to the people of the country.

Maken alleged that Congress and other like-minded Opposition parties are being selectively targeted by IT Department, which he described as the BJP's "frontal organisation".

He said Supreme Court will soon hear Congress's plea on IT department's demands from it.

"An illegal attempt to freeze the bank accounts of the principal Opposition party in February has gone on for more than a month on the eve of the general election," Maken said.

The income-tax returns filed by the Congress for eight years have been reopened on "baseless and manufactured" grounds to levy illegal IT demand orders totalling thousands of crores of rupees, Maken said.

The timing of the IT department's action -- in February and March, days before and even days after the Lok Sabha polls were announced on March 16 -- speaks for itself about the mala-fide nature of these actions, he said.

Maken alleged that the "BJP-ruled IT department" has so far forcibly taken out Rs 135 crore from the Congress's bank accounts due to an alleged Rs 14 lakh non-compliance demand against the party.

"This amount was recovered by freezing more than Rs 270 crore of the Congress' bank balance across several accounts," he said.

"This action was designed to choke the Congress financially and prevent, stop, delay and disable any election-related expenditure by the. Why is Congress, a tax-exempt political party like others, being "forced" to pay income tax during the 2024 Lok Sabha election, he asked. "Why have BJP or its alliance partners not been dealt with similarly? Why has the IT department not taken cognisance of the Yediyurappa diaries, Jain diaries, Sahara diaries, Birla diaries, Bangaru Lakshman convictions and penalised the BJP?" he asked. —*PTI*

Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh, Ajay Maken and Pawan Khera during a press conference, in New Delhi, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

LEFT PARTIES GET IT NOTICE OF ₹11 AND ₹15 CRORE

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Communist Party of India (CPI) has received a notice from the IT department, asking it to pay "dues" of Rs 11 crore for using an old PAN card while filing tax returns during the last few years, sources said on Friday.

They said the Left party is consulting its lawyers to challenge the notice of the tax authorities.

The sources said the "dues" to be paid to the IT Department include penalties and interest due to authorities for "discrepancies" in the use of an old PAN card by the party.

The IT department has also withdrawn the tax exemption of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) for the year 2016-17 and taxed the Left party Rs 15.59 crore for not declaring a bank account in its tax returns for the year. CPI(M) has claimed that it had filed its IT returns in compliance with the notice and that not mentioning the bank account was an "oversight" on its part. —*PTI*

After US, UN calls for fair trial in Kejriwal arrest

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

A day after India lodged a strong protest with the senior official from the US Embassy about the comments made by the US State Department regarding the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, the United Nations has now waded in saying that it hopes that everyone's rights are protected, including political and civil rights, and everyone can vote in an atmosphere that is free and fair.

Earlier, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) objected to the remarks of the US State Department spokesperson on Kejriwal's arrest in connection with the Delhi liquor policy case and dismissed the comments as 'unwarranted'.

'The recent remarks by State Department are unwarranted. Any such external imputation on our electoral and legal processes is completely unacceptable. In India, legal processes are driven only by the rule of law', MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said during a weekly media briefing. He further emphasised that mutual respect and understanding form the foundation of international relations and States are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty and internal affairs of others. Earlier on Wednesday, US State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller was asked about his response to India's summoning US diplomat over comments on Kejriwal's arrest and freezing of Congress party's bank accounts, to which he said that they are following these actions closely.

Last Friday, a spokesperson of the German Foreign Ministry, when questioned about the arrest of Kejriwal, said that he was entitled to a fair trial. Making a strong statement against the German Foreign Office spokesperson's remarks, India said that it sees these remarks as interference in India's 'judicial process' and 'undermining the independence' of the Indian judiciary, the Ministry of External Affairs said last week. Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate for alleged money laundering in connection with the Delhi excise policy case. —*ANI*

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Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

- He further emphasised that mutual respect and understanding form the foundation of international relations and States are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty and internal affairs of others.

GOOD FRIDAY

Christians re-enact crucifixion of Lord Jesus to commemorate Good Friday at St Theresa Church, in JC Road, Bengaluru on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

'Cong will give 50% quota for women in govt jobs'

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Congress will reserve 50 per cent of government jobs for women if it is voted to power, former party chief Rahul Gandhi said on Friday, asserting that powerful women will change the destiny of India.

Gandhi asked why even today only one in three women is employed and why is there only one woman in 10 government jobs.

"Isn't the population of women in India 50 per cent? Is the presence of women in higher secondary and higher education not 50 per cent? If so, then why is their share in the system so less?" former Congress chief said. "Congress wants - 'Aadhi Abaadi Poora Haq', we understand that women's potential will be fully utilized only when women have equal contribution in the government running the country," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

"We are also in favour of immediate implementation of women's reservation in Parliament and in assemblies," Gandhi said. Women with secure income, future, stability and self-respect will truly become the strength of the society, he asserted. —*PTI*

Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

B'luru records hottest March day in 5 yrs

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Bengaluru on Friday recorded the hottest March day in the last five years.

The mercury soared to a scorching 36.4°C, 2.2 degrees Celsius higher than the average expected temperature during March.

According to IMD, this is the hottest March day recorded in the City since 29 March, 1996 where the temperatures reached 37.3 degree Celsius. Friday was the third hottest day in a decade and the fourth hottest day in the last 15 years. The average temperature for Bengaluru is 33.1 degree Celcius. —*Salar News*

Bengaluru's hottest March days

Date	Temp in °C
29 March, 1996	**37.3**
15 March, 2018	**33**
5 March, 2024	**36**
29 March, 2024	**36.4**

Cong names 3 more LS candidates from K'taka

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Congress on Friday announced three more candidates, including Sandur MLA E Thukaram for the Ballari Lok Sabha constituency.

The party has named Sunil Bose, Karnataka Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa's son, as its Chamarajanagar LS candidate.

"Bose has been in politics for the past 20 years and hence is eligible to get a Congress ticket," a close confidant of Mahadevappa told PTI.

The party announced that it would be fielding All India Youth Congress General Secretary Raksha Ramaiah as its Chikkaballapur candidate, a Congress office-bearer said.

The party, however, has remained indecisive about Kolar, which has become a vexatious issue.

- The party announced that it would be fielding All India Youth Congress General Secretary Raksha Ramaiah as its Chikkaballapur candidate, a Congress office-bearer said. The party, however, has remained indecisive about Kolar, which has become a vexatious issue.

Amid strong speculation that the party is keen on fielding Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa's son-in-law Chikka Peddanna, five legislators, including two ministers, threatened to quit.

Alarmed by the rebellion over this issue, Congress has not yet named the candidate yet. —*PTI*

INDIA announces LS seat-sharing for Bihar

PATNA, 29 MARCH

The Mahagathbandhan, the Opposition coalition in Bihar, on Friday announced that RJD, its largest constituent, will contest 26, out of the state's 40 Lok Sabha seats. Congress will contest nine seats, followed by CPI(ML) 3 and CPI and CPI(M) 1 each. As per the announcement, Congress has been made to give up the Purnea Lok Sabha seat, which recent entrant Pappu Yadav, husband of Rajya Sabha MP Ranjeet Ranjan, was hoping to contest, claiming that he had received assurance of Congress ticket from Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi. —*PTI*

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10 killed after SUV falls into gorge in Ramban

MIAMI, 29 MARCH

Ten people were killed after an SUV skidded off the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway and fell into a gorge in Ramban district on Friday. The vehicle, a Tavera, was on its way to Jammu from Srinagar and it fell into a 300-foot gorge at Battery Cheshma area of the district around 1.15am. The bodies of nine passengers and the driver of the sports utility vehicle (SUV) have been recovered. —*PTI*

Miami Open: Bopanna, Ebden enter doubles final

MIAMI, 29 MARCH

Indian tennis stalwart Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden sailed into the men's doubles final of the Miami Open with a straight-set win over Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos. Bopanna and Ebden, the Australian Open winners, hardly broke a sweat to get the better of Spain's Granollers and Argentina's Zeballos 6-1 6-4 in the semifinals on Thursday night. Following the Australian Open triumph, the 44-year-old Bopanna had climbed to the world No.1 spot in the ATP rankings, becoming the oldest player to do so. .—*PTI*

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5% ARE BILLIONAIRES

44% of MPs face criminal charges: ADR

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Out of the 514 sitting Lok Sabha MPs analysed, 225 (44 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves, according to the self-sworn affidavits analysed by poll rights body Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR).

Out of those analysed, 5 per cent are billionaires, with assets exceeding Rs 100 crore.

The report by the ADR, which scrutinised affidavits of the sitting MPs, revealed that among the sitting MPs with criminal charges, 29 per cent face serious criminal cases, including allegations of murder, attempt to murder, promoting communal disharmony, kidnapping, and crimes against women.

Out of the sitting MPs with serious criminal cases against them, nine face murder cases. The analysis revealed that five of these MPs belong to BJP.

Furthermore, 28 sitting MPs have declared cases related to attempt to murder, with a majority—21 MPs—belonging to BJP.

Similarly, 16 sitting MPs face charges related to crimes against women, including three allegations of rape.

The report also sheds light on the financial aspects of these lawmakers.

Among major parties, BJP and Congress have the highest number of billionaire MPs, though the analysis shows significant representation from other parties as well.

Regarding the distribution of criminal cases among states, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Himachal Pradesh stand out with more than 50 per cent of their MPs facing criminal charges.

Additionally, the analysis unveils disparities in wealth among MPs, with some having assets worth hundreds of crores, while others have minimal assets.

The report also highlights the educational background, age, and gender distribution among the sitting MPs. —*PTI*

Furthermore, 28 sitting MPs have declared cases related to attempt to murder, with a majority—21 MPs—belonging to BJP **PHOTO: PTI**

- Out of the sitting MPs with serious criminal cases against them, nine face murder cases. The analysis revealed that five of these MPs belong to BJP.

JUSTICE SERVED: WIFE OF LATE BJP MLA ON MUKHTAR ANSARI'S DEATH

VARANASI, 29 MARCH

Alka Rai, wife of late BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai, who was killed by Mukhtar Ansari, said on Friday that "justice has been served" with the death of the gangster-turned politician. Anasri died in a hospital in Banda, Uttar Pradesh, on Thursday. Rai said, "We never celebrated Holi after the incident (the murder), I felt that today is Holi for us. It is a day of happiness for those children who were orphaned because a criminal has been removed from the earth." In April 2023, Ansari was convicted and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for the murder of Ra. He was sentenced to life in prison on 13 March for use of forged documents for obtaining an arms licence.

Ansari was subjected to slow poisoning in jail: Son

Ansari was subjected to slow poisoning in jail, Umar Ansari, the son of the gangster-turned-politician, alleged early Friday. However, the charge has been denied by authorities. Ansari was brought to the Rani Durgavati Medical College from the jail in "an unconscious state." —*ANI*

>>>More on Page 3

Couple held for trying to rob and kill their aunt

Bengaluru, 29 March

The RMC Yard police arrested a couple for allegedly trying to rob and murder their aunt on Thursday. The incident took place on 18 March at Yeshwanthpur. The victim, who has no children, had raised her elder sister's daughter and even got her married. The couple, aware of the woman's wealth had hatched the plan to steal. On the day of the crime, the accused lured the woman to a deserted area near APMC Yard on the pretext of resolving the financial crisis. Finding the woman alone, the woman's=son-in-law attempted to stab her with a knife. The woman managed to escape and upon returning home, she found her cash and jewellery missing. The police recovered the murder weapon (a knife) and a watch.
—Salar News

Youth held for death of friend due to rectal blowout

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

An employee of a car service centre, whose prank with an air compressor led to the death of his friend in Thanisandra, was arrested on Friday. The deceased, Yogesh R, took his bike for a repair and wash at his friend Murali's car service centre on Monday evening. Murali, 23, washed the bike and was drying it with an air compressor. While having a banter, Murali blew the air towards Yogesh, who was wearing shorts. Yogesh then turned around and bent down. The pressure of the compressor was so high that it entered the anus and ruptured the rectum. Yogesh, 24, fell unconscious on the ground, bleeding and was taken to the hospital. He died on Wednesday morning. Murali was booked under the charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, police said.
—Salar News

Musical play on Easter to be staged today, tomorrow

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

All People's Church in Bengaluru is organising a musical play on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ at St Joseph's College of Law on Saturday and Sunday.The musical play, titled 'Not Forgotten', themed on Easter will be held at 6:30pm on Saturday and the second show at 10:30am on Sunday at the auditorium of the college located at Field Marshal Cariappa Road in Ashok Nagar. The public is allowed free entry to the play.
The play boasts a 90-member crew, including 50 cast members, and features five acts and 12 scenes. The production incorporates a blend of new and familiar elements, with two original songs alongside five well-known worship compositions. The play employs innovative sets, lighting and sound design, along with an LED wall, a live band, and talented singers. Those interested in attending can register at apcwo.org/eastermusical.
—Salar News

Kolar: High drama as Cong scrambles to finalise pick

Cong may choose candidate who does not belong to any faction

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Amid speculations that Congress may choose a candidate who does not belong to any faction in Kolar for Lok Sabha polls, Minister KH Muniyappa warned that such plans will not be result-oriented.

He urged Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress President DK Shivakumar to unite factions led by him and former Legislative Assembly Speaker KR Ramesh Kumar, to ensure Congress' victory in the Kolar Lok Sabha segment.

Five Congress legislators including a Minister on Wednesday threatened to resign if the Lok Sabha ticket is given to Muniyappa's son-in-law Chikka Peddanna to contest from Kolar, bringing into open the divisions in the outfit.

The party is yet to announce its candidate in the segment, currently held by the BJP.

"I have assured that if the ticket is given to someone I have suggested I will ensure the candidates victory. As a member of parliament for over 30 years, having won the seat seven times, I know how to ensure victory in the constituency," Muniyappa said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, it was earlier decided unanimously at a meeting to which Ramesh was also a party, that all leaders from the region will work together, keeping aside past differences to win in Kolar and Chikkaballapur constituencies, and everyone will abide by the party decision.

Muniyappa had returned to state politics after losing the 2019 Lok Sabha polls from Kolar against BJP's S Muniswamy. He is currently MLA from Devanahalli and Minister for Food and Civil Supplies. Muniyappa further said the Chief Minister seems to be planning differently (a new candidate who is not from any faction).

Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar on Thursday held a meeting with the lawmakers from Kolar who had threatened to resign over possible candidacy of Peddanna, and wanted someone from the SC (Right) sect to be fielded. Peddanna belongs to SC (Left).

Tle legislators who had threatened to quit are: three MLAs -- Kothur G Manjunath (Kolar), KY Nanjegowda (Malur) and MC Sudhakar (Chintamani) -- and two MLCs -- Anil Kumar and Naseer Ahmed (the political secretary to Siddaramaiah). Sudhakar is the Higher Education Minister in the Siddaramaiah Cabinet.

The row over the Kolar seat is seen as a sequel to a long drawn fight between two factions of the Kolar Congress, one led by Muniyappa and another by Ramesh vying for supremacy in the district.

The party should not be affected because of "our egos", he said.
—PTI

KH Muniyappa **PHOTO: PTI**

KR Ramesh Kumar **PHOTO: PTI**

CONG POSTPONES PRAJADHWANI MEET IN KOLAR

KOLAR, 29 MARCH

Congress has postponed Praja Dhwani conventions scheduled at Kolar district on Friday due to the differences between warring groups in the district.

Leaders of Kolar Congress unit, including Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar and Chief Minister's Political Secretary Naseer Ahmed, threatened to resign their legislator's post if the candidate for Lok Sabha elections from Kolar is from Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa's family.

The differences among these leaders have not only made the party high command put the announcement of the party candidate on hold but also made the party top brass search for a neutral candidate who can take both factions together.

The delay in announcing the candidature has sent wrong signals among the party cadre and if any outsider is made the party candidate, it would dampen the spirits among the local aspirants, said S Manjunath, Vice President, Backward Class unit of KPCC.
—Salar News

Conspirator Shareef provided IEDs for cafe blast: NIA

DANIEL GEORGE
BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Muzammil Shareef, who was arrested on Wednesday for being a co-conspirator in Rameshwaram Café blast which rocked Bengaluru on 1 March, provided logistic support like Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and other materials for the blast, according to NIA officials.

Shareef was in constant touch with the alleged bomber, Mussavir Shazeeb Hussain, and another conspirator Abdul Matheen Taha before the blast. Shareef along with the other accused had conducted a trial blast near Tunga River in Shivamogga before the blast at Rameshwaram Café at Brookfield. The 29-year-old even visited Bengaluru a fortnight before the blast, investigations revealed.

Shareef hails from Kalasa town in Chikkamagaluru district and lived with his mother at a rented accommodation in Ayappa Nagar in Kalasa town. His wife is pregnant and is currently at her maternal home in Mangaluru.

Shareef started off his long stint in Bengaluru as an apprentice at a chicken shop and then he moved to a well-known omni channel meat brand. He worked for 16 years in the City across various meat brands. He then moved back to Chikkamagaluru six months ago.

Muzammil Shareef **PHOTO: SALAR**

Shareef had come under the police radar in 2020 during an investigation into an Islamic State recruitment plot in south India, but was not arrested then. He was arrested on Wednesday after National Investigation Agency (NIA) teams raided 18 locations, including 12 in Karnataka, five in Tamil Nadu and one in Uttar Pradesh.

NIA Inspector General Santosh Rastogi is heading the probe into the café blast case. Investigations are on to find out who radicalised and recruited Shareef who is suspected to have deep links with sleeper cells in Southern Tamil Nadu.

NIA has widened the net for Hussain and Taha who are on the run since the blast. Both the terror accused are wanted in other terror cases linked to Al Hind, Karnataka module. Hussain was spotted at the Ballari bus stand on the night of the blast.
—Salar News

Only Modi can solve all problems: HDD

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda on Friday said there are no leaders other than Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah who can solve all the problems at the national level.

He underlined the need for better coordination between his party and BJP to achieve the target of winning all the 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka.

JD(S) joined NDA in September last year. As part of the seat-sharing deal in the State, BJP will contest in 25 constituencies and the JD(S) in three.

Noting that the role of former Chief Minister and BJP stalwart BS Yediyurappa was very important, Gowda said he must forget whatever had happened in the past "because the time is very short".

"Our opponents are so strong. Don't think that we are going to win all the 28 seats unless and until we forget what all had happened in the past and our differences," he said.

Gowda cautioned the BJP and JD(S) leaders against taking Congress lightly as, he claimed, the Mallikarjun Kharge-led outfit has "huge financial resources."
—PTI

HDK ASKS BJP, JD(S) WORKERS TO WORK UNITEDLY

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Former chief minister and JD(S) State President HD Kumaraswamy on Friday said that the victory of Congress is impossible if BJP and JD(S) alliance leaders lay a solid foundation.

Speaking at BJP and JD(S) meeting, Kumaraswamy said that the formation of the government at the Centre for the third time is certain and nobody can stop it. "Booth and district level should work without mutual suspicion amongst BJP and JD(S). Congress cannot come to power if the alliance parties stand strong. The alliance has created fear amongst Congress leaders."

Kumaraswamy confirmed that the alliance was not temporary and will continue after the elections as well. "In each constituency, our party will add at least 25,000 votes to the vote banks of the BJP candidate," said Kumaraswamy.
—Salar News

Former PM HD Deve Gowda, former CMs BS Yeddiyurappa and HD Kumaraswamy at Coordination Committee Meeting in Bengaluru on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ASAD**

PREPARATION ON

Congress Bengaluru Central Lok Sabha candidate Mansoor Ali Khan interacts with residents at Hennur Biodiversity Park, Sarvagnanagar, on Friday **PHOTO: SALAR**

NIA ANNOUNCES RS 10L FOR INFO ON KEY SUSPECTS IN CAFE BLAST

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

National Investigation Agency (NIA) has issued a public lookout notice for two individuals suspected in the Rameshwaram Cafe blast case. The agency has announced a reward of Rs 10 lakh for each suspect for any information leading to the accused.

The suspects are Hussain Shazib and Abdul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa.
—Salar News

K'taka HC emphasises dam safety amid mining disputes

MYSURU, 29 MARCH

The Karnataka High Court underscored the paramount importance of preserving the integrity of the Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) dam on the Cauveri River, emphasising that the decision of experts regarding mining activities in its vicinity shall be deemed final.

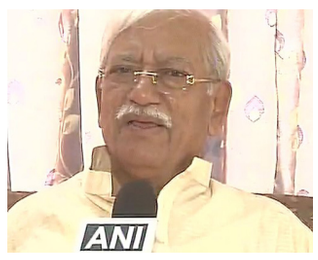
The ongoing legal saga involves Manchammadevi Stone Crusher whose operations were suspended following a notice issued by the District Stone Crusher Licensing and Regulatory Authority on 20 January. Challenging the suspension, the owner, YB Ashok Gowda Patel, approached the High Court, arguing that their unit, primarily engaged in crusher and m-sand production, posed no threat to the dam's integrity and operated well beyond the designated 20-kilometre radius.

The ongoing saga involves Manchammadevi Stone Crusher whose operations were suspended following a District Stone Crushery's notice **PHOTO: PTI**

The petition, filed by the owner of the sand unit, was heard by a divisional bench comprising Chief Justice NV Anjaria and Justice Krishna S Dixit on Thursday.

The bench emphasised the need to safeguard the KRS dam from any potential damage, stressing that the decision-making authority in matters concerning quarrying and blasting activities within a 20-kilometre radius of the reservoir lies with the Karnataka State Reservoir Safety Committee.

As stakeholders await further developments, the Court's emphasis on dam safety underscores the critical need for judicious decision-making in matters concerning environmental conservation and infrastructure protection.
—Salar News



BJP MP Jigajinagi **PHOTO: ANI**

MP JIGAJINAGI FILES COMPLAINT OVER LAND FRAUD

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Yelahanka Newtown police have registered a case against Karnataka Bank's Indiranagar branch and two people after BJP MP Ramesh Jigajinagi complained that his land was acquired using forgery.

Jigajinagi bought 8 acres and 16 guntas of land at Shyampur, Yelahanka, from Tulsi Ramegowda in March 1990. The MP then entrusted Prakash with an unregistered General Power of Attorney (GPA) to facilitate the acquisition of a Development Rights Certificate (DRC) from Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). Owing to his political engagements, Jigajinagi did not closely monitor the affairs concerning the land.

According to Jigajinagi's account, by concocting fake documents and falsely claiming his consent, a fraudulent sale agreement was executed in the register office of Ganga Nagar, suggesting that he had transferred his GPA to Hardik Gowda. Leveraging these fabricated documents, Gowda allegedly acquired a DRC in his name from the sub-register office of Gandhinagar. TDR (Transfer of Development Rights) was subsequently transferred to Adi Bhaskar and Karnataka Bank branch in Indiranagar, Jigajinagi said in his complaint.

The case has been registered against Hardik Gowda, Adi Bhaskar and Karnataka Bank's Indiranagar branch.
—Salar News

ALL EYES ON BIG FISH

This LS polls is a big battle for 'Bhoomi Putra' Kharge

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

For Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge, who calls himself "Bhoomi Putra" of State, Lok Sabha elections is another prestigious battle of sorts in less than a year.

With Congress winning only one seat in the 2019 in State, his task is now cut out.

A strong show by Congress in his home State is bound to boost the veteran leader's stock not just in his party but in the Opposition INDIA bloc as well, according to a political analyst. Kharge was credited in part with playing a key role in keeping factional feuds in the party at bay back then and saw to it that the outfit faced the polls unitedly.

Congress went on to score a landslide victory, winning 135 seats in the 224-member Assembly, ousting BJP from power, strengthening Kharge's hands at the national level in no small measure.

According to political observers, Kharge is sure to put his might behind the party campaign for Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka. Congress in the State is banking on the five guarantee schemes, and also leverage the 'Kharge factor' to widen its reach, particularly with Dalits.

Kharge won the Lok Sabha elections from Kalaburagi in 2009 and 2014, but lost in the 2019 elections. Popularly known as "Solillada Saradara", (a leader without defeat), that was the first electoral loss for Kharge -- a nine-time MLA and two-term Lok Sabha member -- in his political life spanning several decades. This time, he chose to opt out of the contest given his responsibilities as AICC President and coordination with INDIA. The party has fielded his son-in-law Radhakrishna Doddamani from Kalaburagi.

Reportedly, had Kharge himself contested from his home turf of Kalaburagi, it would certainly have had a ripple effect in the region, helping Congress garner a greater vote-share. Kharge, who is now the Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha, is the second AICC president from State after S Nijalingappa, and only the second leader, after Jagjivan Ram, to spearhead Congress, from the Dalit.
—PTI

- A strong show by Congress in his home state is bound to boost the veteran leader's stock not just in his party but in the INDIA bloc as well

Congress went on to score a landslide victory in 2023, winning 135 seats in the 224-member Assembly, ousting BJP from power **PHOTO: ANI**

Odisha MLA quits Congress after 38 years

BHUBANESWAR, 29 MARCH

Three-time Congress MLA and former minister Surendra Singh Bhoi resigned from the primary membership of the party after 38 years and joined the ruling BJD on Friday. Two BJP leaders – Nilgiri MLA Sukant Nayak and the party's Cuttack district president Prakash Chandra Behera - also resigned from their party and are likely to join BJD. In a letter to AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge, Surendra Singh Bhoi said he has resigned from the post of Bolangir district Congress committee (DCC) president as well as the party. Former Chitrakonda MLA and BJD leader Dambaru Sisa also resigned from the primary membership of the party on Thursday.—*PTI*

BJP's Patra lodges plaint against TMC for privacy violation

KOLKATA, 29 MARCH

BJP's Basirhat candidate Rekha Patra, who had highlighted the plight of women in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali, has lodged a complaint with National Commission for Women against TMC nominee Debangshu Bhattacharyya for alleged violation of her privacy. She also shot off a letter to National Commission for Scheduled Castes, alleging that Bhattacharyya, TMC nominee from Tamluk Lok Sabha seat and head of the party's social media cell, made the details of her personal information and bank accounts public. Patra, through her counsel, urged the commissions to take immediate action against TMC leader for "violating her right to privacy, outraging her modesty, and breaching provisions of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Protection (Prevention of Atrocities) Act". National Commission for Women chairperson Rekha Sharma criticised TMC government. —*PTI*

Ex-M'rashtra min Meenakshi Patil dies at 77

MUMBAI, 29 MARCH

Former Maharashtra minister and Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) leader Meenakshi Patil died at the age of 77 in her native Alibag taluka of Raigad district due to a prolonged illness, party sources said. She is survived by a son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren, the sources in PWP said. Patil represented the Alibag assembly constituency thrice - in 1995, 1999 and 2009. She was a minister of state in Maharashtra during the government led by Vilasrao Deshmukh in 1999. Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar condoled Patil's death. He described her as a fearless leader whose life was devoted to the welfare of the weak, deprived and marginalised sections of society. —*PTI*

BRS MLA slams Rao, Srihari's choice to join Cong

HYDERABAD, 29 MARCH

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) sitting Rajya Sabha MP Keshav Rao and former Deputy CM of Telangana State Kadiyam Srihari are likely to join Congress. They announced quitting BRS and joining Congress Party in the presence of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. BRS Korutla MLA Sanjay slammed them, calling them traitors. Sanjay said, "They are very elderly people, Keshav Rao is 85 years old and Kadiam Srihari is 70 years old. I used to call them sir, giving them respect. But today I am saying that they are traitors of Telangana who don't have shame. I never speak bad words about anyone but today I am saying it because they are joining hands with Revanth Reddy and abandoned the party." Voting across all 17 seats in Telangana will be conducted in a single phase on 13 May. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, BRS won nine of 17 seats, while BJP and Congress bagged four and three seats, respectively. —*ANI*

Security tightened in UP post Ansari's death

Section 144 has been imposed in Uttar Pradesh after suspected poisoning of the gangster-politician

LUCKNOW, 29 MARCH

Security personnel in several districts of Uttar Pradesh remained on alert on Friday, a day after jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari died of cardiac arrest at a hospital in Banda.

Prohibitory orders under section 144 of the CrPC have been imposed across the state and teams of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) along with the local police have been deployed in Banda, Mau, Ghazipur and Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police Prashant Kumar said earlier.

People had also started gathering at Ansari's residence in Ghazipur and there was a large deployment of security personnel around the house.

Principal of the Banda Medical College Hospital Suneel Kaushal said the postmortem of Ansari is underway at the hospital and the entire process is being videographed.

Senior officials, including District Magistrate Durga Shakti Nagpal, Superintendent of Police Ankur Agarwal and a large number of security personnel are present at the hospital. Paramilitary forces and central forces have been deployed as a precautionary measure outside the medical college, officials said.

Gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari died of cardiac arrest in a hospital in Banda *PHOTO: ANI*

The 63-year-old Ansari was brought to the Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda from the district jail in "an unconscious state" on Thursday evening and died at the hospital following a cardiac arrest, Kaushal had said.

Family members of Ansari, including his son Umar Ansari, and counsel Naseem Haider will take the body to his home town Ghazipur for last rites after the postmortem.

Speaking to reporters, Umar alleged that his father was subjected to slow poisoning in jail. However, authorities have denied the charge.

Ansari was brought to the medical college around 8.25 pm on Thursday in an unconscious state after he had complained of vomiting. A team of nine doctors attended to him but he died of cardiac arrest, the medical bulletin stated.

Afzal Ansari, who is also the Ghazipur MP, on Tuesday alleged that his brother was given slow poison in jail.

Earlier, Ansari was hospitalised for around 14 hours on Tuesday after he complained of abdominal pain.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said it is the responsibility and duty of the government to protect someone's life in every situation and place and demanded a probe under the supervision of a Supreme Court judge into the death of the former MLA. —*PTI*

Mukhtar Ansari: A career in crime and politics

LUCKNOW, 29 MARCH

Mukhtar Ansari straddled the worlds of crime and politics in Uttar Pradesh. He entered the domain of crime when he was just 15 and ended up being booked in 65 criminal cases.

Ansari, who was elected an MLA five times, died of cardiac arrest in a hospital in Banda on Thursday.

He had his first brush with the law in 1978 when he was booked for criminal intimidation at Saidpur Police Station of Ghazipur.

Over the next decade, Ansari became a common face of crime with at least 14 more cases under serious charges lodged against him.

His growing criminal graph, however, did not hinder his entry into politics.

Ansari was first elected an MLA in the Uttar Pradesh assembly in 1996 on a ticket from Bahujan Samaj Party from Mau. He continued his successful run for the seat as an independent candidate in the 2002 and 2007 assembly elections.

In 2012, he launched Qaumi Ekta Dal (QED) and won from Mau again.

In 2022 he vacated the seat for his son Abbas Ansari who won the seat on the ticket of Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party.

He had 28 criminal cases, including that of murder, and seven cases under the UP's Gangster Act registered against him since 2005.

Ansari was awarded a life term and a penalty of Rs 2.02 lakh by Varanasi MP/MLA earlier this month in a case of fraudulently obtaining an arms licence around 37 years ago.

Uttar Pradesh government had to approach the Supreme Court to bring Ansari back to the state from Ropar jail in Punjab.

Since 2020, Ansari gang has been under an intense heat from police, which either seized or demolished illegal property worth Rs 608 crore belonging to the gang.

Illegal business, contracts, or tenders worth over Rs 215 crore of the gang were also stopped by the police in this period. —*PTI*

ANSARI LIVED IN FEAR IN JAIL POST AIDES' MURDERS

LUCKNOW, 29 MARCH

At least four of gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari's close aides were killed in custody since 2018, making him fear for his own life.

The noose around Ansari, who had over 60 cases lodged against him, began tightening after BJP government came to power in Uttar Pradesh in 2017.

A year after the change of government Ansari, the five-time MLA from Mau, got a blow when his close aide Prem Prakash Singh alias Munna Bajrangi was killed in Baghpat jail. Despite 23 reminders to the Punjab government, Ansari stayed in Ropar Jail for almost two years.

The then Congress government in Punjab led by Capt Amarinder Singh kept avoiding his transfer from Ropar Jail citing his medical condition. Ansari was eventually brought back and sent to Banda Jail in April 2021 following the Supreme Court orders. —*PTI*

Mahagathbandhan announces LS seat-sharing for Bihar

PATNA, 29 MARCH

The Mahagathbandhan, the Opposition coalition in Bihar, on Friday announced that RJD, its largest constituent, will contest 26, out of the state's 40 Lok Sabha seats.

Congress will contest nine seats, followed by CPI(ML) 3 and CPI and CPI(M) 1 each.

As per the announcement, Congress has been made to give up the Purnea Lok Sabha seat, which recent entrant Pappu Yadav, husband of Rajya Sabha MP Ranjeet Ranjan, was hoping to contest, claiming that he had received assurance of Congress ticket from Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi.

The seat will be contested by RJD, which recently gave the party ticket to JD(U) turncoat Bima Bharti, but stopped short announcing it formally.

The Mahagathbandhan's seat-sharing announcement comes a day after the filing of nomination papers for the first phase of Lok Sabha polls was over. RJD has fielded its candidates in all four seats going to polls in the first phase, in what has been resented by allies as a "unilateral move".

The RJD-led Mahagathbandhan in Bihar on Friday announced its formula for seat-sharing *PHOTO: PTI*

- The Mahagathbandhan, the Opposition coalition in Bihar, on Friday announced that RJD, its largest constituent, will contest 26, out of the state's 40 Lok Sabha seats

Mahagathbandhan press conference here was scheduled to be addressed by RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, who, however, remained conspicuous by his absence.

RJD National Spokesman and Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha, who spoke at the press conference, said names of candidates would be announced soon in seats where the same has not been done already.

Notably, CPI and CPI(M) have already announced their candidates for Begusarai and Khagaria respectively.

Jha, who spoke in the presence of state Congress President Akhilesh Prasad Singh and other allies, maintained, "We have arrived at a unanimous decision and we will win". —*PTI*

CLIMATE CHANGE

Modi and Bill Gates discuss India's green GDP evolution

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said parameters used to measure progress are detrimental to climate and suggested developing the concept of a green gross domestic product.

In an interaction with philanthropist and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, he also said that climate action has gained momentum since the G20 Summit in India last September. When Gates asked if the green approach could be made more affordable for easier adoption, Modi said the world needs to adopt a two-pronged strategy: first, nature and climate-friendly innovation, and second, environmentally-friendly lifestyles.

Prime Minister said, "Our current challenge is how we perceive progress. For example, a country's development is often judged by its steel consumption and energy usage. Based on these criteria, we calculate the country's economy."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in an interaction with philanthropist and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates *PHOTO: PTI*

"If we continue to rely on these parameters, we will consume more electricity and steel, resulting in increased carbon emissions. This means we need to change our mindset. We need to make lifestyle choices and measure progress in ways that are climate-friendly. Currently, all our measures of progress are detrimental to the climate," he said.Modi noted that his and Gates' perspectives on climate change closely align. Gates praised Modi's "Mission Innovation" launched at the 2015 Paris climate meeting. Gates said the world will probably miss the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Global average temperatures have risen by more than 1.1 degrees Celsius since 1850, exacerbating climate impacts, with 2023 being the hottest on record. —*PTI*

Kangana hits out at RaGa over his 'Shakti remark'

MANDI, 29 MARCH

Kangana Ranaut, BJP candidate from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi on Friday said that people of Mandi should give a befitting reply to Rahul Gandhi over his 'Shakti' remarks, adding that "how can he say such things in a Hindu Rashtra".

Questioning who has been writing his speeches, Kangana Ranaut said, "Rahul Gandhi says he wants to destroy 'Shakti'. Who writes such speeches for him? How can Rahul Gandhi say such kind of things in Hindu Rashtra? I want the people of Mandi to answer to those who have spoken indecently about women. The people of India have always blessed me."

'Shakti' remarks row erupted earlier this month following Gandhi's remarks during the campaign conclusion speech in Mumbai's Shivaji Ground.

Kangana Ranaut *PHOTO: PTI*

BJP also filed a complaint with Election Commission against Rahul Gandhi over his remarks.

"As the term 'Shakti' is traditionally associated with the female deity and women folk in India, thus along with hurting the religious sentiments, it also has an underlying misogynistic tone," BJP said in its complaint.However, Rahul stated that his remarks were being distorted. —*ANI*

AAP'S NEW MISSION

Kejri's wife launches Whatsapp campaign

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

A day after the custody of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was extended till 1 April by the local court, his wife Sunita Kejriwal, issuing a video statement, launched a WhatsApp campaign titled 'Kejriwal ko Aashirwaad'.

"We are starting a drive from today - Kejriwal ko aashirvaad. You can send your blessings and prayers to Kejriwal on this number. You can also send whatever message you want" Sunita Kejriwal said

"Kejriwal has put his stand in court, He is a true patriot. Partiotism is in his veins. Arvind has challenged the most powerful forces in the country, will you not support your brother in this fight." she added.

Sunita Kejriwal *PHOTO: ANI*

During the court hearing on Thursday, Arvind Kejriwal himself addressed the court and said there were only four statements against him, including C Arvind, where he claimed that he gave some documentation to Manish Sisodia in his presence. —*ANI*

'Sunita preparing to hold CM's post like Rabri Devi'

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Friday compared Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita to former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi, and said she is perhaps preparing to hold the post of her husband.

"The madam you are naming is perhaps preparing to hold the post like Rabri Devi did in Bihar," he told reporters here at the inauguration of the Delhi BJP's election office.

The Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs was responding to a question about Sunita Kejriwal who has been briefing media on behalf of her husband, since his arrest by the ED last week.

Earlier in the day, Sunita Kejriwal launched a WhatsApp campaign, urging people to support her husband, who is in ED custody in an excise policy-linked money-laundering case.

Hardeep Singh *PHOTO: PTI*

When Puri was asked how serious challenge the AAP-Congress alliance in Delhi was for BJP, he said, "Which alliance? What are you talking about? They (Congress) have not released the names of candidate."

He slammed AAP and its leaders saying they joined politics pledging to fight corruption and now they have allied with the "most corrupt" Congress. —*PTI*

LS polls: TDP announces final list of candidates

AMARAVATI, 29 MARCH

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) announced its final list of candidates for nine Assembly seats (MLA), and four Lok Sabha seats (MP) on Friday.

Former minister Kimidi Kala Venkata Rao was fielded from Cheepururpalli to fight Education Minister Botcha Satyanarayana of the YSR Congress. Another former minister, Ganta Srinivasa Rao, will be contesting from Bhimili.

The candidates for other Assembly seats were also announced that includes Killu Venkata Ramesh has been fielded from Paderu (ST), Gottipati Lakshmi from Darsi, Sugavasi Subrahmanyam from Rajampet, Veerabhadra Goud from Alur, Gummanur Jairam from Guntakal, Daggupati Venkateshwara Prasad from Anantapur Urban and Kandikunta Venkata Prasad from Kadiri.

Chandrababu *PHOTO: PTI*

Meanwhile, for the Lok Sabha elections, the party has fielded Kalisetty Appala Naidu from Vizianagaram, Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy from Ongole and others. —*ANI*

LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

79,000 violations reported via C-Vigil app: EC

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Election Commission (EC) on Friday said its C-Vigil mobile application has become an effective tool in the hands of people for flagging poll code violations and since the announcement of the Lok Sabha election, more than 79,000 complaints have been received.

More than 99 per cent of the complaints have been resolved and close to 89 per cent of those were resolved within 100 minutes, the poll panel said.

More than 58,500 complaints (73 per cent of the total number of complaints) received were against illegal hoardings and banners, the EC said, adding that over 1,400 complaints received pertained to money, gifts and liquor distribution.

PHOTO: PTI

- Election Commission (EC) on Friday said its C-Vigil mobile application has become an effective tool in the hands of people for flagging poll code violations and since the announcement of the Lok Sabha election, more than 79,000 complaints have been received.

Close to 3 per cent of the complaints (2,454) were related to defacement of property.

Of the 535 complaints received for display of firearms and intimidation, 529 have been resolved, the poll panel said.

A total of 1,000 complaints were for campaigning beyond the prohibited period, including those related to the use of speakers beyond the permitted time.

The EC pointed out that at the press conference to announce the Lok Sabha poll schedule, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar had urged citizens to be vigilant and use the app to report Model Code of Conduct violations and distribution of any kind of inducements among voters.

The seven-phase polls were announced on March 16 and voting will take place between 19 April and 1 June. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Popular Chennai club's ceiling collapses, 3 dead

CHENNAI, 29 MARCH

Three people died after a false ceiling collapsed at Sekhmet club in Chennai, an official informed. The victims were workers of the Club, Joint Commissioner East Zone, Dharmaraj told ANI. "We have started an investigation. We can only ascertain if a case is made out against anyone once the reason for the collapse is determined. Based on what comes out in in the investigation, the responsibility will be fixed and appropriate action taken," the Joint Commissioner East Zone said. Further details are awaited. *—ANI*

Mumbai man impersonates official, case filed

THANE, 29 MARCH

The Navi Mumbai police have launched a probe after an unidentified individual attempted to impersonate a senior staffer of the Central Industrial Security Force, officials said on Friday. It was alleged that a person used a photograph of the CISF Director General as WhatsApp display image, sent a message to the CISF control room on Thursday posing as the top official and made casual inquiries. CISF guards the country's most critical infrastructure facilities like nuclear installations, space establishments, airports, seaports and power plants. After being alerted about the impersonation attempt, the Kharghar police registered a case under the Indian Penal Code section 420 (cheating) and the Information Technology Act, the official said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Mumbai: 6 held for beating, forcing man to lick shoes

THANE, 29 MARCH

Six people were arrested in Navi Mumbai for allegedly assaulting a man, who was accused of stealing spices from the firm where he worked, and forcing him to lick shoes, a police official has said. The APMC police station official said the incident took place on Wednesday evening. "The man, who is employed in a trading shop in APMC, was assaulted by Raunak Dayaljibhai Bhanushali, proprietor of the trading firm, and his staff, identified as Sanjay Chowdhary, Lalaji Babubai Pagi, Virendra Kumar Laxman Gautam, Yogesh and Karan," he said on Thursday. "The man was accused of stealing cardamom. He was beaten up, stripped and forced to lick the shoes of the accused Bhanushali. They also videoed the incident. *—PTI*

MP girl 'raped' & killed, villagers go on rampage

JABALPUR, 29 MARCH

Residents of a village in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district set ablaze a liquor shop after the body of an 8-year-old girl was found in a lake, a police official has said. Irate villagers, including the mother of the victim, alleged she was raped, murdered and her body thrown into the lake by a person or group of people who had liquor at the vend, which was set on fire on Tuesday night, the official said."The girl's body was found on Tuesday night. A short post-mortem suggests she was physically assaulted," Jabalpur (Rural) Additional Superintendent of Police Sonali Dubey told PTI over the phone.Her short post-mortem was conducted on Thursday. Police said. *—PTI*

Red Sea crisis: Ports struggle as ships re-route

Lankan ports are experiencing a notable increase in activity

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

In the wake of vessel re-routings aimed at avoiding the Red Sea, bunker demand across ports in both India and Sri Lanka has witnessed a massive surge, highlighting a growing challenge for the maritime industry.

While India contends with supply shortages, Sri Lankan ports are experiencing a notable increase in activity.

According to S&P Global Commodity Insights, the demand spike, estimated to be over 30 per cent in ports across India and Sri Lanka, has been primarily attributed to longer voyages undertaken by ship owners and charters to circumvent the Red Sea region.

Consequently, ports on India's west coast, particularly Kochi and Mumbai, are grappling with disrupted VLSFO (Very Low Sulfur Fuel Oil) supplies, exacerbating the situation.

Platts, a division of S&P Global Commodity Insights, reported that while 0.5 per cent marine fuel oil delivered to Kochi saw a USD 20/mt increase to USD 700/mt CFR, prices in Mumbai fell to USD 698/mt, down by USD 8/mt. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, prices at Colombo were assessed at USD 700/mt, reflecting a decrease of USD 7/mt on the week.

Ports on India's west coast, particularly Kochi and Mumbai, are grappling with disrupted VLSFO PHOTO: PIXABAY

A trader based in Gujarat highlighted the substantial rise in demand, and told S&P Global, "Demand has substantially increased, almost by 30 per cent across Mumbai, Kochi and Gujrat ports. Long haul vessels are calling more often now. The volumes that were being lifted at King Abdullah port, Yanbu, Djibouti and Suez Canal have now shifted to Indian and Sri Lankan Ports."

Echoing this sentiment, a supplier based in Kandla noted, "Longer voyages coupled with a shortage of VLSFO at some Indian ports has increased demand at Kandla and Mundra."

The supply crunch at Indian ports, particularly Kochi, has further bolstered demand at Sri Lankan ports like Colombo and Hambantota.

A Bunkerworld survey revealed a significant surge in bunker sales volume at Colombo, reaching 40,000 mt/month, up from an average of 30,000 mt/month prior to the disruptions in the Red Sea region.

Despite the increased demand, Sri Lankan ports remain well supplied through consistent inflows from Fujairah and Singapore.

A supplier from Kochi highlighted the market conditions, stating, "For VLSFO the queries have reduced a lot as the market knows we're out of product. Whatever prices are being quoted are only on best endeavor basis (subject to availability)."

He added, "With that condition, both traders and clients do not want to take any risk. We're not getting any queries for MGO and even if we do it's only for smaller parcels that would help cover the voyage to cheaper places."

In response to supply shortages in India, traders have redirected their inquiries to Sri Lanka, further driving up demand in the region. *—ANI*

BOOST FOR TIES

EAM, Ukranian minister discuss war with Russia

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba in New Delhi on Friday as part of a bilateral engagement.

Kuleba, who arrived here on Thursday, is on a two-day visit to India.

"Welcome FM @DmytroKuleba of Ukraine to Hyderabad House. Look forward to our discussions today," Jaishankar posted on X ahead of their talks.

Kuleba's visit comes amid efforts to seek a peaceful resolution to the over two-year-old Russia-Ukraine conflict.

On Thursday, Kuleba had posted on X, "I began my visit to New Delhi upon @DrSJaishankar's invitation. The Ukrainian-Indian cooperation is important and we will be reinvigorating ties. Building on the dialogue between @ZelenskyyUa and @NarendraModi, we will pay specific attention to the Peace Formula."

During his weekly press briefing, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, in response to a query on Kuleba's visit, on Thursday said there will be a "bilateral engagement with the external affairs minister in which they will go over a gamut of issues that lie in the domain of bilateral relations".

They will also "review the Inter-governmental Commission that was held earlier," he had said.

The two leaders will also discuss regional and global issues of common concern, Jaiswal had said, adding that there are several other engagements also lined up for the Ukrainian foreign minister. *—PTI*

- During his weekly press briefing, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, in response to a query on Kuleba's visit, on Thursday said there will be a "bilateral engagement with the external affairs minister S. Jaishankar

TOGETHER IN PRAYER

Muslims offer Friday prayers during the holy fasting month of Ramadan at Jama Masjid Khairuddin mosque, in Amritsar on Friday PHOTO: PTI

PHONE-TAPPING CASE: FORMER DCP QUESTIONED

HYDERABAD, 29 MARCH

A former DCP of the Commissioner's Task Force, a wing of Hyderabad Police, and another police official were questioned by the police in connection with a case of phone tapping and destroying certain computer systems and official data.

"They are being interrogated," a senior police official told PTI on Thursday, amid reports of their arrest.

On 23 March, two additional superintendents of police, who were accused of colluding with suspended DSP of the SIB D Praneeth Rao, were arrested.

Praneeth Rao was accused of erasing the intelligence information from various electronic gadgets as well as phone tapping during the previous BRS government.

On 13 March, Praneeth Rao, accused of developing profiles of several people and monitoring them clandestinely, without authorisation and illegally, besides destroying certain computer systems and official data, was arrested.

As part of investigation into the case, the police had recently issued a lookout circular (LOC) against former SIB chief T Prabhakar Rao and then deputy commissioner of police at the Commissioner's Task Force P Radhakrishna and a senior executive of a Telugu TV channel. *—PTI*

- Praneeth Rao was accused of erasing the intelligence information from various electronic gadgets as well as phone tapping

External Affairs Minister Jaishankar with his Ukraininan counterpart Dmytro Kuleba on Friday PHOTO: PTI

Centre issues advisory over fake calls from telecom dept

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) issued an advisory to citizens today about calls impersonating DoT and threatening people to disconnect their mobile numbers for being involved in illegal activities.

The DoT has also issued an advisory about WhatsApp calls from foreign-origin mobile numbers, like 92, impersonating government officials and duping people.

According to an official release from the Ministry of Communications, "The DoT has issued an advisory to citizens that calls are being received by the citizens wherein callers, in the name of DoT, are threatening that all of their mobile numbers would be disconnected or their mobile numbers are being misused in some illegal activities."

As per the release, cybercriminals, through such calls, try to threaten and steal personal information to carry out cybercrime or financial fraud.

The DoT does not authorise anyone to make such calls on its behalf and has advised people to stay vigilant and not share any information on receiving such calls, it said.

The DoT has also advised citizens to report at cybercrime helpline number 1930 or www.cybercrime.gov.in in case they are already victims of cybercrime or financial fraud. Such proactive reporting helps DoT prevent the misuse. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

- The DoT has also issued an advisory about WhatsApp calls from foreign-origin mobile numbers, impersonating government

AFSPA extended in 4 Assam dists

GUWAHATI, 29 MARCH

The Assam government has extended the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 in four districts for six months from 1 April.

The state government's political department issued a notification, stating that the 'Disturbed Area' tag under the AFSPA has been extended in areas covering Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo and Sivasagar districts.

The Assam Police had submitted a report, asserting that there was an improvement in the law and order situation in the state, barring one militant organisation being active in the four districts.

PHOTO: PTI

The state government's home and political department submitted a proposal to this effect to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, which, after due consideration, decided to maintain the 'status quo' regarding 'disturbed area' for an additional six-month period, an official said.

Subsequently, the state government, acting on the directive of the Centre, extended the Act till 30 September, 2024, he said.

The Act empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior warrant. It also gives a certain level of immunity to the security forces in case of misplaced operations.

The Act was last extended on 1 October, 2023, for six months ending on 31 March. *—PTI*

Court convicts 7 in BSP MLA Raju Pal murder case

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

A special CBI court in Lucknow on Friday convicted seven people in the killing of former BSP MLA Raju Pal in 2005, a case in which murdered gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmad was also an accused, officials said.

The proceedings against Atiq Ahmad, his brother and prime accused Khalid Azim alias Ashraf, and Gulbul alias Rafiq were abated after their death, they said.

Raju Pal, a Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader from Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, was gunned down on 25 January, 2005, as a result of political rivalry with Atiq Ahmad's brother Ashraf, whom he had defeated in the 2004 bypoll to the Prayagraj West seat.

The BSP leader had lost the election to the seat to Atiq Ahmad in 2002 but when the latter vacated it after being elected to the Lok Sabha, Pal defeated Ashraf in the bypoll.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had taken over the probe into the case in 2016.

- Raju Pal, a Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader from Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, was gunned down on 25 January, 2005

The Special Judge CBI, Lucknow, held Ranjeet Pal, Abid, Farhan Ahmad, Israr Ahmad, Javed, Gulhasan, and Abdul Kavi guilty in the case for criminal conspiracy and murder among other serious charges.

Atiq Ahmad and his brother Ashraf were killed in a sensational on-camera shooting on April 15 last year when assailants opened fire at them near a medical college in Prayagraj while in police custody.

The shooting was caught on camera as mediapersons were following the duo being escorted to the hospital by the police for a medical checkup.

At least two people were seen firing from close range at Atiq Ahmad and Ashraf who fell to the ground, while police personnel overpowered the attackers. *—PTI*

ON GOOD FRIDAY

Violence against Christians raised in Kerala

T'PURAM, 29 MARCH

Violence against Christians in Manipur and other parts of India was witnessed during the special prayers on the occasion of Good Friday at the St Joseph's Metropolitan Cathedral here by Latin Catholic metropolitan Archbishop Thomas J Netto.

Netto said that Christians in various parts of the country, especially in Manipur and North India, were being subjected to "cruelty and violence by dark forces" and alleged that there was no effective intervention against it by the authorities.

"So, there is a need to take steps against such evil powers," he said.

He said that if even one person in a country lives in fear, it should be seen as a failure of the nation.

The Christian community in Kerala observed 'Good Friday' in accordance with traditional customs and beliefs by shunning all luxuries and physical comforts and attending special prayers in churches.

The Christian community in Kerala spoke about violence against Christians in Manipur and North India PHOTO: PTI

Hundreds of people walked bearing wooden crosses commemorating the final moments of Christ as part of the 'Way of Cross' processions held under the aegis of various churches, including the Latin Archdiocese here.

The Malayattoor hills in Ernakulam district, atop which the famed St Thomas church is located, there was a massive rush of devotees of all ages and from other states with many of them carrying wooden crosses of various sizes.

Some devotees carried huge wooden crosses as a group, while others, including children, were seen carrying smaller crosses as they trudged up the hill which is believed to have been visited by Apostle St Thomas in AD 52.

Besides regulars, who had been coming to the Malayattoor hills for years, there were also many first timers.

It was observed as a day of prayer and penitence in traditional Christian families in the state who avoided all worldly comforts to mark the day remembering the sufferings of the Christ. *—PTI*

- Some devotees carried huge wooden crosses as a group, while others, including children, were seen carrying smaller crosses as they trudged up the hill which is believed to have been visited by Apostle St Thomas in AD 52

GOOD FRIDAY PROCESSION

Christian devotees participate in a crucifixion procession on the Good Friday, in Mumbai, on Friday. Good Friday is the day Christ was sacrificed on the cross ***PHOTO: PTI***

India needs more national food waste studies: UN

India, along with China, South Africa, Indonesia and Mexico, needs representative national food waste studies given variance in data, according to the latest report released by the United Nations on 27 March, 2024.

The country, along with Indonesia and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) have only 'subnational estimates' regarding food waste, the report noted. Meanwhile, Argentina and Turkiye have no estimates for household food waste.

"In countries with multiple medium confidence estimates for household food waste, substantial variance is observed. This variance, especially in China and South Africa, but also in India, Indonesia, and Mexico, demonstrates the need for representative national food waste studies in these countries," the report, titled Think Eat Save: Tracking Progress to Halve Global Food Waste, read.

The analysis locates India in the Southern Asia subregion of Asia-Pacific. The other sub regions include Central Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand, Micronesia, and Melanesia and Polynesia.

An estimate of household food waste has been identified from each region, with the exception of Central Asia and Polynesia, according to the report.

Southern Asia had the greatest number of household food waste data points, with 31 estimates over seven countries, equating to an estimate for all countries in the sub region except Iran and Nepal.

The report defines a "data point" as an individual estimate in a study included in the calculation. "Some countries have multiple data points due to having multiple studies from different time periods or different subnational areas," it noted.

India, for instance, is among countries that have estimates from both rural and urban areas.

Southern Asia shows a large range of food waste estimates — from 19 kilograms per capita per year for Bhutan to 212 kilograms per capita per year for Pakistan.

Food more than US$1 trillion is wasted every year. The report calls this a 'market failure' ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

In Bhutan, a nationwide waste audit assigned a high confidence rating. It suggested that in "rural areas where there are no waste collecting facilities [...] they use food wastes as either animal food or dumped in vegetable gardens directly."

The report notes "...countries with disaggregated data for urban and rural areas are relatively rare, but typically show lower levels of food waste in rural areas".

This, it says, may be because rural areas have greater circularity in their food systems (including feeding scraps to animals and composting). Also, special attention is needed to help circularity thrive in the city.

Besides Bhutan, food waste estimates for Pakistan stood at 212 kilograms per capita per year. The Maldives had two estimates of 209 and 206 kilograms per capita per year across 2018 and 2019. Afghanistan produced an estimate of 186 kilograms per capita per year.

Nourishment for billions wasted

The report also revealed some very worrying statistics regarding food waste worldwide. Food worth more than US$1 trillion is wasted every year. The report calls this a 'market failure'. The wastage of food is also an 'environmental failure', it says. This is because food waste generates an estimated 8-10 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and takes up the equivalent of nearly 30 per cent of the world's agricultural land.

Even as even as food is being thrown away in such voluminous amounts, up to 783 million people are affected by hunger each year. Some 150 million children under the age of five suffer stunted growth and development due to a chronic lack of essential nutrients in their diets.

Global food waste datapoints have doubled since 2021. That is when the Food Waste Index Report 2021 was released.

Yet, as the report finds, few countries have robust baselines suitable for tracking progress to 2030.

It urges governments, cities, food businesses, researchers and non-governmental organisations of all sizes globally to play a role in joint efforts to change practices and behaviours; target hotspots; innovate; and deliver SDG 12.3.

The Goal 12.3 aims to halve global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses, including postharvest losses, along supply chains by 2030.

"Halving food waste is a job that is too large for any one stakeholder. However, it can be achieved through concerted, collaborative effort to commit to the SDG 12.3 target, and most importantly act to achieve food waste reduction," the report states.

—Downtoearth

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Instagram, Threads to start limiting political content

Meta's Instagram and Threads apps are "slowly" rolling out a change that will no longer recommend political content by default. The company defines political content broadly as being "potentially related to things like laws, elections, or social topics".

Users who follow accounts that post political content will still see such content in the normal, algorithmically sorted ways. But by default, users will not see any political content in their feeds, stories or other places where new content is recommended to them.

For users who want political recommwendations to remain, Instagram has a new setting where users can turn it back on, making this an "opt-in" feature.

This change not only signals Meta's retreat from politics and news more broadly, but also challenges any sense of these platforms being good for democracy at all. It's also likely to have a chilling effect, stopping content creators from engaging politically altogether.

Politics: dislike

Meta has long had a problem with politics, but that wasn't always the case.

In 2008 and 2012, political campaigning embraced social media, and Facebook was seen as especially important in Barack Obama's success.

The Arab Spring was painted as a social-media-led "Facebook Revolution", although Facebook's role in these events was widely overstated,

However, since then the spectre of political manipulation in the wake of the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal has soured social media users toward politics on platforms.

Increasingly polarised politics, vastly increased mis- and disinformation online, and Donald Trump's preference for social media over policy, or truth, have all taken a toll. In that context, Meta has already been reducing political content recommendations on their main Facebook platform since 2021.

Instagram and Threads hadn't been limited in the same way, but also ran into problems.

Most recently, the Human Rights Watch accused Instagram in December last year of systematically censoring pro-Palestinian content.

With the new content recommendation change, Meta's response to that accusation today would likely be that it is applying its political content policies consistently.

How the change will play out in Australia

Notably, many Australians, especially in younger age groups, find news on Instagram and other social media platforms. Sometimes they are specifically seeking out news, but often not.

Not all news is political. But now, on Instagram by default no news recommendations will be political.

The serendipity of discovering political stories that motivate people to think or act will be lost.

Combined with Meta recently stating they will no longer pay to support the Australian news and journalism shared on their platforms, it's fair to say Meta is seeking to be as apolitical as possible.

The social media landscape is fracturing

With Elon Musk's disastrous Twitter rebranding to X, and TikTok facing the possibility of being banned altogether in the United States, Meta appears as the most stable of the big social media giants.

But with Meta positioning Threads as a potential new town square while Twitter/X burns down, it's hard to see what a town square looks like without politics. The lack of political news, combined with a lack of any news on Facebook, may well mean young people see even less news than before, and have less chance to engage politically.

A chilling effect on creators

Instagram's announcement also reminded content creators their accounts may no longer be recommended due to posting political content.

If political posts were preventing recommendation, creators could see the exact posts and choose to remove them. Creators already spend considerable time trying to interpret what content platforms prefer, building algorithmic folklore about which posts do best.

While that folklore is sometimes flawed, Meta couldn't be clearer on this one: political posts will prevent audience growth, and thus make an already precarious living harder. That's the definition of a political chilling effect.

For the audiences who turn to creators because they are perceived to be relatable and authetic, the absence of political posts or positions will likely stifle political issues.

—The Conversation

The move not only signals Meta's retreat from politicis, but challenges democracy ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

What makes Finland the happiest country in the world?

- The ranking is based on a narrow, wealth and power-oriented form of happiness, rather than a broader definition

Finland steadily ranks as the happiest country in the world. In March 2024 the country was, for the seventh year in a row, ranked as the happiness champion. The ranking is based on one simple question, using a ladder metaphor, that is asked to people across nearly every country in the world. But my team's new experimental study suggests that the ladder metaphor makes people think about power and wealth.

Since 2005, the Gallup analytics organisation has worked to measure happiness across the entire planet. The mission is particularly important as more and more governments say they are prioritising the wellbeing of their people.

For example, all OECD countries now measure the happiness of their people including the UK. More than a decade ago, Bhutan declared that the primary goal of their government was "gross national happiness", not gross domestic product.

The world ranking is based on one simple but powerful question, called the Cantril Ladder:

As you read the question, what does the top of the ladder metaphor make you think of and what does it represent to you? Is it love, money, your family – or something else?

I recently led a group of researchers from Sweden, the US and the UK. We investigated these questions in a study on 1,600 UK adults, and published our results in Nature Scientific Reports. We carried out an experiment with five independent groups.

One group was asked what the top of the ladder represented to them.

Another group was asked the exact same question, but this time the ladder metaphor, including the picture of the ladder, was removed and the term "ladder" replaced with "scale".

Our study found that the ladder metaphor made people think more of power and wealth and less about family, friends and mental health. When the ladder metaphor was removed, people still thought of money, but more in terms of "financial security" rather than terms like "wealth", "rich" or "upper class".

The type of happiness Finns excel at may be power and wealth-focused ***PHOTO: VISITFINLAND.COM***

In a third group, people interpreted a question where the ladder metaphor as well as the top v bottom description in the question were removed.

In a fourth and fifth independent group, in addition to the above changes, the phrase "best possible life" was substituted with "happiest possible life" and "most harmonious life," respectively.

People in the happiness and harmony groups thought less about power and wealth and more about broader forms of wellbeing such as relationships, work-life balance and mental health, compared to the other groups.

People don't want the top of the ladder

My research team also asked people where they wanted to be on the scale of the different questions. Researchers often assume that people want the best possible life but, to our knowledge, no one had tested this. The results showed that in none of the groups did more than half the participants want a ten, the best possible life. The typical desire was a nine.

What does this say about the happiness rankings where Finland are frequently the champions? Well, there is a risk that the ranking is based on a narrow, wealth and power-oriented form of happiness, rather than a broader definition. This does not mean that Finns are unhappy, but the type of happiness they excel at may be power and wealth-focused.

Our study findings raises the question of what type of happiness we want to measure. A person's idea of happiness can't be determined by a researcher. That is why researchers must ask people about their concept of happiness.

Research has shown that when people define happiness, they only mention wealth and status to a small degree. It is well established that money relates to wellbeing but the money effect is weaker than many other happiness factors, where good quality social relationships have the strongest effect.

Recent research from the University of Oxford shows happiness actually causes people to be more productive and the most important factor for happiness at work is belongingness. Salary, on the other hand, is believed to be the most important driver for happiness at work, but it turns out to be a much weaker driver of happiness at work than belongingness. This aligns with the general message from the happiness science that relationships are the most important factor for happiness.

What type of happiness do we want to measure?

Previous research has shown that the Cantril Ladder reflects people's income levels and social status to a larger degree than other wellbeing metrics. The current study adds more evidence that perhaps the simple but powerful question could be supplemented with extra questions in the future, to clarify what people mean by happiness.

Our study was conducted solely in the UK, so of course this research should be performed in other countries too, given the global nature of this topic. However, our results indicate that we aren't necessarily measuring happiness and wellbeing in a way that is in line with how we actually define those concepts in our lives.

—The Conversation

PHOTO: X/@KHALEEJTIMES

Japan health sacre: 5 dead, 100 in hospital

TOKYO, 29 MARCH

In the week since a line of Japanese health supplements began being recalled, five people have died and more than 100 were hospitalised as of Friday. Osaka-based Kobayashi Pharmaceutical Co came under fire for not going public quickly with problems known internally as early as January. The first public announcement came 22 March. Company officials said 114 people were being treated in hospitals after taking products, including Benikoji Choleste Help meant to lower cholesterol, that contain an ingredient called benikoji, a red species of mold. Some people developed kidney problems after taking the supplements, but the exact cause was still under investigation in cooperation with government laboratories, according to manufacturer. *—PTI*

Japan expands foreign worker visa programme

TOKYO, 29 MARCH

The Japanese government on Friday added four new industries to its foreign skilled worker visa programme as it moves to address the nation's driver shortage by allowing more people access to stays of up to five years, according to Japanese news agency, Kyodo News. The expansion of visa programme, covering road and railway transportation as well as the forestry and timber sectors, is the first since the system was introduced in 2019. Japan's need for foreign labour has risen due in part to its declining birthrate. There are also concerns about pronounced shortages in the transportation and logistics industries which are likely to be exacerbated once a new limit to overtime hours for drivers begins in April, in what is known as the "2024 problem." *—ANI*

'Oppenheimer' premieres in Japan to mixed reactions

TOKYO, 29 MARCH

'Oppenheimer' finally premiered Friday in the nation where two cities were obliterated 79 years ago by the nuclear weapons invented by the American scientist who was the subject of the Oscar-winning film. Japanese filmgoers' reactions understandably were mixed and highly emotional. Toshiyuki Mimaki, who survived the bombing of Hiroshima when he was 3, said he has been fascinated by the story of J. Robert Oppenheimer, often called "the father of the atomic bomb" for leading the Manhattan Project. "What were the Japanese thinking, carrying out the attack on Pearl Harbor, starting a war they could never hope to win," he said, sadness in his voice, in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. *—AP*

Security beefed up around churches in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, 29 MARCH

Sri Lanka was put on high alert on Friday and security beefed up in major cities across the country, with special surveillance around the Churches having Good Friday services, according to a senior police official. Police spokesman Nihal Thalduwa said that over that 6,000 police personnel, over 3,000 military soldiers and over 400 elite special task force members have been deployed across the country on the occasion of Good Friday. "We have identified 2,268 churches having Good Friday services to provide special security," Thalduwa said. Police have also set up a special hotline to report any suspicious movements near the churches. Police said they were taking all precautions in view of the fifth anniversary of 2019 Easter Sunday bombings which killed 270 people, including 11 Indians. *—PTI*

Russia closes UN tracking of North Korea sanctions

Ukraine said Russia's veto was tantamount to 'a guilty plea'

MOSCOW, 29 MARCH

Russia has shut down a panel of UN experts that have for years monitored sanctions against North Korea.

The panel last week said it was probing reports that Russia violated rules by buying North Korean weapons like ballistic missiles for use in Ukraine. The UN's Security Council has imposed a series of sanctions on Pyongyang since 2006 for its nuclear weapons programme.

Those restrictions are still in force - but the experts group set up to monitor violations will now be disbanded. In a Security Council vote on Thursday, Russia used its veto power as a permanent member to block the renewal, while 13 of the other 14 member states present voted for it. China, Pyongyang's closest ally, abstained. Russia's block triggered a wave of condemnation from the US, UK, South Korea and other Western allies and comes after a year of high-profile public meetings between Moscow and Pyongyang leaders. This is the first time Russia has blocked the panel - which has been renewed annually by the UN Security Council for 14 years.

The UN's Security Council has imposed a series of sanctions on Pyongyang since 2006 PHOTO: BBC

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on social media Russia's veto was tantamount to "a guilty plea" that it was using North Korean weapons in the war. The US, UK and France all told the Council that Russia was silencing the watchdog because it had begun to report on Moscow's own violations of the rules-specifically purchasing weapons from North Korea for the battlegrounds in Ukraine.

- The panel last week said it was probing reports that Russia violated rules by buying North Korean weapons like ballistic missiles for use in Ukraine

Meanwhile, South Korea's representative at the UN criticised Russia's "blind self-centeredness" and said it had no justification "for disbanding the guardians" of the sanctions regime. "This is almost comparable to destroying a CCTV to avoid being caught red-handed," Ambassador Hwang Joon-kook said.

Russia has consistently denied using North Korean weapons and its representative at the UN again dismissed the accusations on Thursday. *—BBC News*

2.2 MILLION DISPLACED

UN's top court orders Israel to allow aid into Gaza

GAZA, 29 MARCH

The UN's top court has ordered Israel to enable the unhindered flow of aid into Gaza in order to avert a famine.

In a unanimous decision, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) said Israel must act "without delay" to allow the "provision... of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance". This follows warnings that famine could hit Gaza within weeks. Israel has called allegations it is blocking aid "wholly unfounded".

Giving its response to the court order, the Israeli foreign ministry said it was continuing "to promote new initiatives, and to expand existing ones" to allow a continuous flow of aid into Gaza "by land, air and sea", working with the UN and others.

It said that Hamas was to blame for the situation in Gaza and for starting the war. The latest ruling by the court in The Hague comes after South Africa asked it to bolster an order issued to Israel in January to take all measures to prevent genocidal acts in Gaza. The UN Security Council is the only UN body which can introduce measures to try and ensure compliance.

The ICJ's ruling comes after a report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Global Initiative, which is run by the World Food Programme and others, was published last week - warning that a "catastrophic" situation was developing in Gaza. It said that all of the 2.2 million people in Gaza were "facing high levels of acute food insecurity" and that famine was projected to hit the north of the territory before the end of May.

Famine occurs when a country has such a severe food shortage that its population faces acute undernourishment, starvation, or death. In its ruling, the ICJ said Gaza was "no longer facing only a risk of famine" but "famine is setting in" and that, according to UN observers, 31 people, including 27 children, had already died of malnutrition and dehydration. *—BBC News*

An aircraft airdrops humanitarian aid over the northern Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel PHOTO: PTI

Netanyahu tells hostages' families 'Your boys are our heroes'

TEL AVIV, 29 MARCH

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday met with families of the Israeli soldiers who are being held hostage by Hamas in Gaza and told them at the start of the meeting, "I know that every passing day is hell for you." "Your boys are our heroes, heroes of Israel," he added. "Just as we have returned 123 of our hostages as of today, I am committed to returning everyone, all of them." *—ANI*

Meeting with IMF scheduled for 14-15 April, says Pak FM

KARACHI, 29 MARCH

Pakistan's Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Friday said the government will hold a meeting with the IMF on 14 and 15 April in Washington to discuss the features of the new bailout programme which the cash-strapped country is seeking, according to a media report.

The minister for finance and revenue in the Shehbaz Sharif government, while addressing journalists during his visit to the Pakistan Stock Exchange here, reiterated that the government plans to enter a major programme with the International Monetary Fund which will ensure microeconomic stability, Geo News reported. Aurangzeb said the features of the new programme would be discussed during the meeting, while detailed talks would be held in Pakistan, the report said. Prime Minister Shehbaz on 21 March signalled that the new IMF programme was likely to be continued for three years. Shehbaz, while addressing a session of the Special Investment Facilitation Council's apex committee attended by civil-military leadership, said the new tranche of loan was likely to be received from the IMF in a few days. "We would need another programme," he added. He also said the country's current account was "better" and the exchange rate was also "stable", the report said. Aurangzeb said the inflation rate has also decreased and credited the accomplishments to the stand-by arrangement agreement during Shehbaz's tenure. *—PTI*

ONLY ONE SURVIVED

Bus plunges off bridge in South Africa, killing 45

The bus plunged 50 metres into a ravine PHOTO: BBC NEWS

RIO, 29 MARCH

A bus has plunged off a bridge into a ravine in South Africa, killing 45 of the 46 passengers on board, according to the Department of Transport.

The only survivor, an eight-year-old girl, was airlifted to hospital with serious injuries after the crash on Thursday. Authorities said the driver lost control of the vehicle and crashed through the barriers on a bridge in a mountainous area near Mamatlakala, 300 kilometres (190 miles) north of Johannesburg. The bus plunged 50 metres (164 feet) into a ravine before bursting into flames. The bus was on its way from neighbouring Botswana to Moria, a town in northern Limpopo province that holds a popular Easter festival. Easter Sunday falls on 31 March this year. Transport Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga travelled to the scene of the crash and promised a full inquiry.

"We want really to extend our heartfelt condolences to the families but also to the government of Botswana and to the people of Botswana, and as South Africa, we will try everything to assist so that they go back to their country and families to be buried with dignity," she was quoted as saying by national broadcaster SABC.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa sent his condolences to Botswana and promised support, his office said in a statement. Search operations were continuing at the site, but many bodies were burned beyond recognition and were still trapped inside the vehicle. While South Africa has one of the African continent's most developed road networks, it also has one of the worst safety records. A few hours before the crash, Ramaphosa had appealed to South Africans to take care when travelling during the Easter holidays.

"Let's do our best to make this a safe Easter. Easter does not have to be a time where we sit back and wait to see statistics on tragedy or injuries on our roads," he had said in a statement. *—Al Jazeera*

At least 40 killed in air strikes on Syria

SOHR said the alleged Israeli strikes also caused multiple injuriesx PHOTO: X/ @TDHOANH

DAMASCUS, 29 MARCH

At leas 40 people have been killed in air strikes in north-west Syria, reports say.

Syria's defence ministry said Israeli planes targeted several sites in the Aleppo countryside at 01:45 on Friday (22:45 GMT Thursday). A UK-based monitoring group said a weapons store of the Hezbollah militant group was hit. It described those killed as "regime soldiers".

Israel's military told BBC it would not comment on foreign media reports. The monitoring group - the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) - said it was the highest number of dead among Syrian forces in a single such "Israeli attack".Citing two security sources, Reuters news agency said five Hezbollah fighters were among the dead, putting the death toll at 38.

Syria's defence ministry said civilians and Syrian military personnel had been killed. It said the air strikes were carried out "in conjunction with" with drone attacks by "terrorist organisations" against Aleppo city and the surrounding area, though it did not give any further information.

The SOHR, which uses an extensive network of contacts in Syria, said the alleged Israeli strikes also caused multiple injuries, some serious.

It said the strikes hit the weapons warehouse in Jabrin area near Aleppo international airport and targeted Syrian air defence forces facilities in Al-Saferah, about 20km (12.5 miles), south-east of Aleppo city. It also said explosions were heard in the Kafr Joum area of western Aleppo. *—BBC News*

Good Friday: Filipino man nailed to cross for the 35th time

MANILA, 29 MARCH

A Filipino villager has been nailed to a wooden cross for the 35th time to reenact Jesus Christ's suffering in a brutal Good Friday tradition he said he would devote to pray for peace in Ukraine, Gaza and the disputed South China Sea.

On Friday, over a hundred people watched on as 10 devotees were nailed to wooden crosses, among them Ruben Enaje, a 63-year-old carpenter and sign painter.

Ruben Enaj PHOTO: AP

The real-life crucifixions have become an annual religious spectacle that draws tourists in three rural communities in Pampanga province, north of Manila.

The gory ritual resumed last year after a three-year pause due to the coronavirus pandemic.

It has turned Enaje into a village celebrity for his role as the "Christ" in the Lenten reenactment of the Way of the Cross.

Ahead of the crucifixions, Enaje told The Associated Press by telephone Thursday night that he has considered ending his annual religious penitence due to his age, but said he could not turn down requests from villagers for him to pray for sick relatives and all other kinds of maladies. *—AP*

'Haiti needs 5K policemen to tackle gang violence'

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 29 MARCH

- Last July, William O'Neill said Haiti needed between 1,000 and 2,000 international police trained to deal with gangs

Haiti now needs between 4,000 and 5,000 international police to help tackle "catastrophic" gang violence which is targeting key individuals and hospitals, schools, banks and other critical institutions, the UN rights expert for the conflict-wracked Caribbean nation said Thursday.

Last July, William O'Neill said Haiti needed between 1,000 and 2,000 international police trained to deal with gangs. Today, he said the situation is so much worse that double that number and more are needed to help the Haitian National Police regain control of security and curb human rights abuses.

O'Neill spoke at a news conference launching a UN Human Rights Office report he helped produce which called for immediate action to tackle the "cataclysmic" situation in Haiti where corruption, impunity and poor governance compounded by increasing gang violence have eroded the rule of law and brought state institutions "close to collapse". The report, covering the five-month period ending in February, said gangs continue to recruit and abuse boys and girls, with some children being killed for trying to escape. Gangs also continue to use sexual violence "to brutalise, punish and control people", the report said, citing women raped during gang attacks in neighbourhoods, "in many cases after seeing their husbands killed in front of them". *—AP*

OUTPACED BY BIDEN

Trump may raise $33 M during fundraiser

FLORIDA, 29 MARCH

Former president Donald Trump's campaign is seeking to outraise President Joe Biden next week, aiming to take in USD 33 million to top a new single-event fundraising record set by Biden on Thursday with USD 25 million, said a person familiar with the Trump event who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal planning.

Trump is inviting wealthy donors to Palm Beach, Florida, home to his Mar-a-Lago estate, for an 6 April fundraiser hosted by New York hedge fund billionaire John Paulson and listing as co-chairs other high-dollar donors such as Las Vegas-based businessman Robert Bigelow, casino mogul Steve Wynn and New York grocery billionaire John Catsimatidis. Guests are being asked to contribute USD 8,14,600 per person as a "chairman" contributor or USD 250,000 per person. Perks of attendance include a personalised copy of Trump's coffee table book with photographs from his administration.

Guests are being asked to contribute USD 8,14,600 per person as a 'chairman' contributor PHOTO: PTI

Assuming that Trump succeeds in raking in the jaw-dropping sum, the glitzy event offers Trump an opportunity to shift the narrative following months of negative headlines that have focused on his dwindling political cash hauls and his use of tens of millions of dollars in donations to pay legal fees from a myriad of court cases he faces.

Throughout his career in business and politics, Trump has a well-established reputation for inflating, or understating, his cash position -- depending on need. His political committees, too, have relied on accounting gimmicks, including the recent clawback of an over USD 50 million donation -- used to seed a pro-Trump super PAC, it was later refunded to help pay his mounting legal bills.

The haul would showcase Trump's newfound ability to rake in massive checks now that he is the Republican Party's presumptive nominee. Effectively controlling the RNC, Trump and his political operation can take advantage of the far higher contribution limits that apply to party committees. While candidates alone can accept a maximum donation of USD 3,300, under a new joint fundraising agreement between his campaign and the RNC, a single donor could stroke a check for just over USD 800,000. *—AP*

ZF Rane Automotive acquires TRW Sun

GURUGRAM. 29 MARCH

Auto components maker ZF Rane Automotive India Pvt Ltd, on Friday, announced the acquisition of steering wheels manufacturer TRW Sun Steering Wheels Pvt Ltd for an undisclosed sum. Gurugram-headquartered TRW Sun Steering Wheels (TSSW) is a JV between the Sun Group and ZF Group globally. It manufactures various types of steering wheels for the Indian market and supplies to a diverse set of passenger vehicle customers from its manufacturing plants in Gurugram and Pune, ZF Rane Automotive India said in a statement. The acquisition places ZF Rane Automotive India in a strong position to provide comprehensive solutions covering occupant safety and system integration services to domestic customers, it added. ZF Rane Automotive India is a joint venture between ZF Group in India and Rane Group. *—PTI*

Huawei's profit more than doubles in 2023

HONG KONG, 29 March

Chinese telecoms gear company Huawei Technologies has reported its profit more than doubled last year as its cloud and digital businesses thrived in spite of U.S. sanctions. The Shenzhen-based company reported a net profit of USD 12 billion, helped by strong sales and an improved product portfolio. Revenue jumped nearly 10% from a year earlier, to USD 97.4 billion. Huawei's rotating chairman Ken Hu said the company's figures were in line with forecasts. "We've been through a lot over the past few years. But through one challenge after another, we've managed to grow," Hu said. Huawei also said it profited from "gains from the sales of some businesses." It did not specify which businesses were sold. *—PTI*

ICICI Securities' retail distribution head quits

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

ICICI Securities on Friday said Kedar Deshpande, head of retail distribution, has resigned from the brokerage firm to pursue alternate career opportunities. The resignation will take effect from the close of business hours on 12 April, 2024. "Kedar Deshpande, Head - Retail Distribution (within the category of senior management in the Company), vide letter dated March 28, 2024, has tendered his resignation from the services of the company," ICICI Securities said in a regulatory filing. In his letter to ICICI Securities Managing Director and CEO Vijay Chandok, Deshpande said: "I wish to resign from the company to pursue alternate career opportunities outside the ICICI Group". ICICI Securities is currently in the process of delisting itself from the stock exchanges. The brokerage firm would be merged with its promoter ICICI Bank after successful delisting. ICICI Bank currently holds a 74.77 per cent stake in ICICI Securities. *—PTI*

Ecos (India) Mobility files draft paper with SEBI

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Chauffeur-driven mobility provider Ecos (India) Mobility & Hospitality Ltd has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to garner funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The maiden public issue is entirely an offer for sale (OFS) of 1.8 crore equity shares by promoters -- Rajesh Loomba and Aditya Loomba -- with no fresh issue component, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Thursday. At present, promoters and promoter group entities hold 100 per cent stake in the company. Since it is an OFS, the Delhi-based firm will not receive any proceeds from the IPO and the money will go to the promoters selling shares. *—PTI*

Airlines roar back in unexpected places

Global air traffic jumps by 16 per cent

SINGAPORE, 29 MARCH

India is expected to become one of the world's fastest-growing civil aviation markets, and third after China and the United States *PHOTO: PTI*

Air India had been mired in debt and under-funded state management for decades. No-one wanted even a piece of the iconic but loss-making carrier.

But a deal was struck in 2021, just as the world was emerging from the pandemic - and airlines were betting big on revenge travel once borders reopened.

The rebound is well and truly under way and air travel is off to a roaring start in 2024. There have been warnings of slower growth in the US, where spending is expected to plateau after a post-pandemic spike. But it is a different story on the other side of the world in Asia.

"If we look at the size of the opportunity in India, it's already the world's most populous country," Air India's chief executive Campbell Wilson said at a recent aviation event in Singapore. "It has the geographic advantage... connecting regions of the world together. And it is a hugely underserved market."

By 2042, India's domestic aviation market is expected to be five times the size it was in 2019, with Indians taking around 685 million trips every year, according to plane maker Airbus. That would make the South Asian nation one of the world's fastest-growing civil aviation markets, and third after China and the United States.By the middle of the century, Indonesia, which now ranks 13th globally in passenger numbers, is predicted to jump to the fourth spot, analysts say. Air travel is also expected to boom in the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam in the coming decades.

Global air traffic jumped by 16 per cent over the last year. But in Asia, the increase was almost twice as much. Beijing is now offering visa-free travel to citizens of certain countries and some nations, like Thailand and Singapore, are reciprocating.

But airlines are looking for alternative markets because of China's slowing economy, the uncertainty of doing business there and a fall in consumer spending.India, is a trickier market to conquer. Air India faces a stiff domestic rival in Indigo, and a daunting challenge in matching Emirates and Qatar Airways, which regularly rank among the world's best airlines.

But the successful salt-to-software conglomerate Tata has started to turn the ailing carrier around. The company has already spent millions of dollars investing in new planes, new branding and restructuring old and inefficient systems. *—BBC News*

None of the investors took part in the meeting *PHOTO: LINKEDIN*

Byju's shareholders don't object to board's resolution

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Shareholders of edtech major Think and Learn, owner of Byju's brand, raised no objection to the resolution to increase authorised share capital of the company in the extra-ordinary general meeting held on Friday, company sources said.

According to the sources, none of the miffed investors, who proposed to oust Byju's founder and family from the management seat, took part in the meeting.

"Meeting started at 10 am with approximately 20 investors representatives in attendance along with Think & Learn management. The requisite quorum required for EGM was there. Few questions regarding the postal ballot were asked and answered by the chairman and CS. Resolutions were called out. No objections raised," sources said.

Byju's held the EGM (extra-ordinary general meeting) to increase authorised share capital of the company to complete the process for raising USD 200 million through rights issue.

A group of four investors -- Prosus, General Atlantic, Sofina, and Peak XV -- along with support from other shareholders, including Tiger and Owl Ventures, have approached the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) against Byju's EGM.

The six investors jointly hold 32 per cent stake in the company.

"Meeting ended at 10.30 am. Further details on the voting and culmination of Rights Issue will be shared later post scrutinizer's report. Contrary to media reports, none of the miffed investors attended the EGM personally to raise any of their concerns," a Byju's source said.

A source from the investor side contested the claim and said that the authorised representatives of all investors attended the EGM.

"Nobody boycotted it. People can vote either at EGM or postal so we will not know the result until after 6 April," the source said.

The option to vote on the Byju's resolution through postal ballot will close on 6 April. *—PTI*

FPIS INFUSE OVER ₹2 LAKH CR IN EQUITIES IN FY24

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Foreign investors made a strong return by injecting more than Rs 2 lakh crore into Indian equities in 2023-24, driven by optimism surrounding the country's robust economic fundamentals amidst a challenging global environment.

Looking forward to 2025, Bharat Dhawan, Managing Partner at Mazars in India, said that the outlook is cautiously optimistic and anticipates sustained Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPI) inflows supported by progressive policy reforms, economic stability, and attractive investment avenues. "However, we remain mindful of global geopolitical influences that may introduce intermittent volatility, emphasising the importance of strategic planning and agility in navigating market fluctuations," he added.

The outlook for FY25 from an FPI perspective continues to remain strong, Naveen KR, smallcase Manager and Senior Director at Windmill Capital, said. In the current fiscal 2023-24, FPIs have made a net investment of around Rs 2.08 lakh crore in the Indian equity markets and Rs 1.2 lakh crore in the debt market. Collectively, they pumped 3.4 lakh crore into the capital market, as per data available with the depositories.

The dazzling resurgence came following an outflow from equities in the preceding two financial years. In 2022-23, Indian equities witnessed a net outflow of Rs 37,632 crore by FPIs on aggressive rate hikes by the central banks globally. Before this, they pulled out a massive Rs 1.4 lakh crore. However, in 2020-2021, FPIs made a record investment of Rs 2.74 lakh crore. *—PTI*

ADANI BEGINS OP OF 775 MW SOLAR WORKS IN GUJARAT

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Adani Green Energy on Friday announced the beginning of the operation of its 775 megawatt solar power projects in Khavda, Gujarat.

The capacities have been operationalised after securing relevant clearances, Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) said in an exchange filing.

Adani Green Energy through its various wholly-owned step-down subsidiaries has operationalised an aggregate 775 MW solar power projects at Khavda, Gujarat, it said.

"Based on the relevant clearances, it was decided at 00:12 am on 29 March, 2024 to operationalize the plant and commence power generation from 29 March, 2024," the company said.Part of the Adani Group, AGEL has the largest operating renewable portfolio in India, spread across 12 states. *—PTI*

Facebook news tab will soon be unavailable in US

LOS ANGELES, 29 MARCH

Meta will be sunsetting Facebook News in early April for users in the US and Australia as the platform further deemphasises news and politics. The feature was shut down in the UK, France and Germany last year.

Launched in 2019, the News tab curated headlines from national and international news organisations, as well as smaller, local publications.

Meta says users will still be able to view links to news articles, and news organisations will still be able to post and promote their stories and websites, as any other individual or organisation can on Facebook.

The change comes as Meta tries to scale back news and political content on its platforms following years of criticism about how it handles misinformation and whether it contributes to political polarisation.

Meta said the change to the News tab does not affect its fact-checking network.But misinformation remains a challenge for the company, especially as the US presidential election and other races get underway.

Rick Edmonds, media analyst for Poynter, said the dissolution of the News tab is not surprising for news organisations that have been seeing diminishing Facebook traffic to their websites for several years, spurring organizations to focus on other ways to attract an audience, such as search and newsletters. *—PTI*

FRESH HOUSING SUPPLY DROPS 15% IN JAN-MAR

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

New supply of residential properties fell 15 per cent during January-March across eight major cities at 69,143 units despite high demand, according to Cushman & Wakefield. Real estate consultant Cushman & Wakefield on Friday released the data for launches of residential properties in the primary (first sale) of eight major cities. New supply has increased in Bengaluru and Mumbai but declined in Delhi-NCR, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Kolkata, and Ahmedabad. Out of the total launches of residential properties in this quarter, the high-end and luxury segment had a 34 per cent share.

Listed, large and regionally reputed developers accounted for over 38 per cent of overall launches in the current quarter. As per the data, the fresh supply of housing properties declined to 69,143 units during January-March 2024 from 81,167 units in the year-ago period. Among cities, the new supply increased in Bengaluru to 8,848 units from 7,777 units.

Hyderabad saw a decline to 11,090 units from 14,371 units, while Kolkata witnessed a fall to 4,753 units from 5,292 units.

The new supply of residential properties in Pune decreased to 11,358 units during January-March 2024 from 13,806 units in the corresponding period of the previous year. *—PTI*

IN 2023, TCS became the first tech firm to create a business unit for AI *PHOTO: PTI*

3.5L workers trained in GenAI, says TCS

MUMBAI, 29 MARCH

Country's largest IT services company TCS on Friday said it has trained 3.5 lakh employees in generative AI skills.

The company, which had in January announced that 1.5 lakh staffers are trained in the skill sets of what is said to be the biggest opportunity for IT services firm in the future, has now taken the number up to over half its employee base. With over 350,000 employees trained on foundational skills in GenAI, TCS is well-poised to build one of the largest AI-ready workforces in the world," an official statement said.

In 2023, it had become the first technology company to create a dedicated business unit for AI and cloud to address the growing needs of customers for cloud and AI adoption.

TCS' work till now includes application of GenAI to enhance customer experience for airlines featuring natural conversations with customers when their flight is delayed or cancelled, and alternative routing options. It has also tapped into GenAI capabilities to simplify the contract review process including identification and validation of clauses, the statement said.On Friday, they announced that Amazon Web Services has recognised it with Generative AI competency partner status.

"Achieving AWS generative competency as a launch partner is a result of TCS' industry-leading and forward-looking investments along with our deep collaboration with AWS," its deputy head of AI. Cloud unit Krishna Mohan said. *—PTI*

India's export to increase by $1 T by 2030

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Despite global trade uncertainties, India's exports are charting a new course, bilateral agreements, free trade agreement (FTA) and venturing into uncharted territories like Africa, Latin America, and Central Asia have led to all time high export of USD.

With these new initiatives, India has seen a surprising surge in exports of precious metals, minerals, automobiles, electronics, pharmaceuticals, organic chemicals, textiles, spices and defence equipment.

Exports from India soared 11.9 per cent year-on-year to USD 41.4 billion in February 2024, the highest level since March 2023, boosted by sales of drugs and pharmaceuticals, engineering and electrical goods.

Exports to new markets like Africa, Latin America and Central Asia, have witnessed a significant influx of USD 234 million worth of goods, including cars, two- and three-wheelers, and precious metals, during the April-December 2023 period..

FIEO DG Ajay Sahai said, "The medium- to long-term prospects of Indian exports are very encouraging. We are on course to reach the target of USD 1 trillion each in goods and services exports by 2030. However, in the first quarter of the next financial year, some challenges may be faced due to high inflation and geopolitical uncertainties. We expect the US Fed to start reducing the key rates in its next review, which will signal other countries central banks, thus pushing demands."

The focus on new markets, bilateral trade pacts, and FTA's extends beyond value, it will reduce dependence on the traditional export items and foster stronger trade partnerships and economic cooperation across continents.

India's main export partners are: United States with 15 percent of the total exports, United Arab Emirates, 11 percent, Hong Kong 5 percent, China and Singapore 4 percent each an d United Kingdom 3 percent. *—ANI*

Kia India looks to expand sales

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH -

- Kia India is also focused on expanding its touchpoints in the Tier-4 and upcountry markets

Kia India on Friday said it is planning to have around 700 sales and service touchpoints in 300 cities by the end of the year.

The automaker, which sells models like Seltos and Sonet, has 522 such touchpoints across 236 cities.

The company said it is focussed on strengthening its presence in Tier-1 and Tier-2 markets, contributing 40 per cent to its total network strength.

Kia India is also focused on expanding its touchpoints in the Tier-4 and upcountry markets, it added.

"We have expanded our touchpoints network from 285 to 522 since starting our operations in India. As part of Kia's 2.0 strategy, we are aiming to close the year with over 700 touchpoints, thereby making Kia more accessible to our esteemed customers," Kia India National Head Sales & Marketing Hardeep Singh Brar said.

The automaker is also committed to sustainability by introducing the green workshop concept and encouraging all its dealer partners to transition to eco-friendly workshops, he added.

Kia India also intends to increase its certified pre-owned network to 100 outlets by the end of 2024. It currently has 59 such outlets across the country. *—PTI*

EV SECTOR GROWTH

Is India doing enough to woo EV makers?

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government approved a new policy for electric vehicles (EVs) this month, offering to lower import tariffs on e-cars for automakers that invest at least USD 500 million to set up manufacturing units in the South Asian country and begin production in three years.

The carmakers are also required to source at least a quarter of their components locally, to begin with. And within five years, the share of local components will have to double.

Companies that meet these requirements will be allowed to import 8,000 EVs a year by paying a lower customs duty, equivalent to about 15 per cent of the cost of the vehicle, far lower than the 60-100 per cent tariffs the government imposes otherwise.

Authorities hope the policy change will lure Tesla to set up plants in India *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

Authorities hope the policy change will lure Tesla to set up plants in India.

Tesla has long eyed opportunities presented by the Indian market, but it didn't want to invest in local production until the government addressed tariff-related issues and the company gauged market sentiment.

"This policy is designed to attract global investments to promote local manufacturing with adequate value addition and to specifically build the e-car manufacturing," Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director at Center for Science and Environment, told DW. Vietnamese automaker VinFast has already announced plans this year to spend up to $2 billion to build an electric vehicle factory in India.

Modi's government has launched a USD 1.3 billion program to encourage EV manufacturing and sales, as part of the efforts to foster a competitive domestic automaking industry.

It's also a part of New Delhi's efforts to slash carbon emissions to net zero by 2070.

The government wants EVs to make up 70 per cent of sales of commercial cars and trucks, and 30 per cent of private cars by 2030.

The industry is estimated to create around 50 million direct and indirect jobs in the next seven years. *—DW News*

PHOTO: AFP

Sindhu goes down fighting and Sikki enters semifinals

MADRID, 29 MARCH

India's PV Sindhu fought her heart out before going down narrowly to Thailand's Supanida Katethong in the women's singles quarterfinals of the Madrid Spain Masters Super 300 badminton tournament here on Friday. Sindhu, who had finished runner-up in 2023, recovered from an early 4-8 deficit and saved multiple game points to grab the opening game, but she couldn't go the distance as the sixth-seeded Thai registered a 24-26 21-17 22-20 win after a see-saw battle.

However, India's husband-wife combo of N Sikki Reddy and B Sumeeth Reddy had a lot to cheer about as they notched up a 14-21 21-11 21-17 win over Indonesia's fourth seed Rehan Naufal Kusharjanto and Lisa Ayu Kusumawati to enter the mixed doubles semifinals. The women's doubles pair of Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, seeded third, lost 13-21 19-21 to sixth-seeded Chinese Taipei's Lee Chia Hsin and Teng Chun Hsun in the quarterfinals. Sindhu had a 5-3 record against the world no. 17 Supanida with the two having played some exciting matches in the last two years. —*PTI*

Abuja's century gives WZ upper hand against Central

PUNE, 29 MARCH

Former India all-rounder Anuja Patil hit an attacking century as West Zone took a substantial 111-run first-innings lead against Central Zone on the second day of the Women's Inter-Zonal Multi-Day Cup here.After Central scored 245 in their first essay, Patil's 122 off 120 balls was well supported by Jemimah Rodriguez (69 of 97 balls) as the pair added 155 runs for the fifth wicket with West ending their first innings at 356.At stumps, Central reached 68 for no loss in the second innings, cutting down the deficit to 43. Openers Punam Raut (32 batting) and Nuzhat Parveen (35 batting) safely negotiated the 25 overs bowled in the final session of the day.Earlier, starting the day at 26 for no loss, West was reduced to 98 for 4 before Patil counter-attacked with 20 fours and a six, scoring at more than a run a ball.—*PTI*

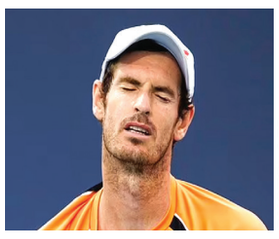


PHOTO: AFP

Andy Murray pulls out of Monte Carlo Masters

MELBOURNE, 30 MARCH

VAndy Murray will miss the Monte Carlo Masters and Munich Open next month as he recovers from a severe ankle injury sustained during his exit from the Miami Open, the Briton's team announced on Friday. The 36-year-old rolled his ankle in the deciding set of his 5-7, 7-5, 7-6(5) defeat by Czech Tomas Machac in southern Florida last Sunday and had said that he would be out for an "extended period" on the sidelines with ruptured ligaments. ."Following consultation with his team and medical experts, Andy Murray has decided to miss the Rolex Monte Carlo Masters and BMW Open Munich "At this stage, it is still not clear how long Andy will be out of action, and he is continuing to review options with his medical team. —*AP*

Rahul-led LSG eye all-round effort against Punjab Kings

LSG's success will also depend on the form of Australian all-rounder Stoinis

LUCKNOW, 29 MARCH

Lucknow Super Giants will aim for an improved all-round effort when they take on Punjab Kings in their second Indian Premier League match here on Saturday.

K L Rahul-led LSG faltered in the opening game against Rajasthan Royals, losing by 20 runs in Chandigarh.

Barring Krunal Pandya, all the LSG bowlers leaked runs and also looked ineffective.

In the absence of Mark Wood and David Willey, LSG's pace battery looks thin with the likes of Mohsin Khan, Naveen-ul-Haq, and Yash Thakur expected to do the heavy lifting.

Fighting for a place in the upcoming T20 World Cup squad, Ravi Bishnoi too looked ordinary in the team's tournament opener.

Skipper Rahul, who has decided to play the wicket-keeper-batter's role keeping the T20 World Cup in mind, made 58 in his comeback game and would be looking to build on that.

Shikhar Dhawan and K L Rahul PHOTO: PTI

He would be hoping his opening partner Quinton de Kock returns to his belligerent best against Punjab after missing out against the Royals. The team is also banking on the likes of Devdutt Padikkal Ayush Badoni, Deepak Hooda, and Krunal to deliver the order.

LSG's success will also depend on the form of Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis, who was the leading run-getter for the team last year with 408 runs.

PBKS, on the other hand, have a 50-50 record so far, winning one and losing one.

The Shikhar Dhawan-led side needs more fluency in the powerplay and that is bound to come if Jonny Bairstow gets going after failing in the first two games. Dhawan, who only plays IPL to IPL, needs to up his strike rate going forward. He admitted to batting a bit "slowly" against RCB.

Prabhsimran Singh, who came of age last season, has not been able to capitalize on his starts yet.

While all-rounder Sam Curran has shown his prowess with the bat in the two matches, the left-arm seamer has been wayward with the ball.

Vice-captain Jitesh Sharma, who is in the running for a World Cup berth, needs to have a stellar season to convince the national selectors.

In the pace bowling department, Kagiso Rabada will look for more support from Curran, Arshdeep Singh, and Harshal Patel. —*PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

PUNJAB KINGS vs LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: BRSABV Ekana Cricket Stadium, Lucknow

Pakistan men's cricket team will tour Ireland PHOTO: AFP

Kohli's fifty guides RCB to 182/6

BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Star batter Virat Kohli's skillful unbeaten fifty formed the foundation of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's competitive 182 for six against Kolkata Knight Riders in their IPL match here on Friday.

Kohli (83, 59b, 4x4, 4x6) and Cameron Green (33 off 21b) milked 65 runs off 42 balls for the second wicket, the primary alliance in RCB innings, as the home side produced a two-faced effort after being asked to bat first on a track that was on the slower side.

An archetypal Dinesh Karthik cameo (20, 8b, 3x6) added gravitas to the RCB total as usual towards the end.

Skipper Faf du Plessis went back early as the Royal Challengers captain's attempt to scoop pacer Harshit Rana ended in the hands of Mitchell Starc inside the circle.

Virat Kohli's skillful unbeaten fifty PHOTO: PTI

But a period of stability followed as Kohli and Green kept RCB on the track with a busy stand that saw them reaching 61 for 1 in the Power Play segment.

Kohli dished out drives and lofts over covers, a new addition to his batting, sweeps, and slog-sweep to fetch his runs, but the shot of the night was a swat-flick off Starc that sailed for a six.

No other shot encapsulates Kohli's batting like the swat-flick – a child of his desire to find newer ways to sustain the domination of bowlers.

A simple snap of wrists and power emanating from a strong bottom hand can turn this traditionally gentle shot into a malevolent run-making option. —*PTI*

STIMAC LIKELY TO REMAIN HEAD COACH

NEW DELHI, 29 MARCH

The top brass of the All India Football Federation (AIFF) is inclined to heed the recommendation of its technical committee to remove national men's team head coach Igor Stimac but contractual issues may make it difficult to do so, PTI has learnt. Also given the fact that India's next World Cup qualifiers round 2 match is slated for June 6 against Kuwait in Kolkata, changing the man at the helm at this point may not be a good idea, according to AIFF sources.

"Under the circumstances, he (Stimac) is likely to be in charge of the team in the next two matches in June. —*PTI*

Pakistan to tour Ireland first time since 2018

LAHORE, 29 MARCH

Pakistan men's cricket team will tour Ireland for the first time since 2018 to play a T20I series as the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has announced the schedule for the three-match series.

All three matches of the series will be played at Castle Avenue in Dublin from May 10 to 14.

Pakistan last visited Ireland for Ireland's inaugural Test match in 2018. That was also the last time that the two teams had met across formats.

This series will be the first multi-match bilateral T20I encounter between Pakistan and Ireland. Previously, the two teams had only clashed once in the shortest format, in a one-off match back in 2009.

A two-match T20I series was scheduled for July 2020, but the tour didn't go ahead due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ahead of the Ireland series, the Men in Green will host New Zealand in a five-match T20I series starting on April 18.After the conclusion of the Ireland tour, Pakistan will face England in four T20Is between 22-28 May. Pakistan Tour of Ireland schedule- 10 May: First T20I, Dublin 12 May Second T20I, Dublin 14 May: Third T20I, Dublin. —*AP*

Bopanna-Ebden sail into men's doubles final

MIAMI, 30 MARCH

Indian tennis stalwart Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden sailed into the men's doubles final of the Miami Open with a straight-set win over Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos here.

Bopanna and Ebden, the Australian Open winners, hardly broke a sweat to get the better of Spain's Granollers and Argentina's Zeballos 6-1 6-4 in the semifinals on Thursday night.

Bopanna had slipped to second spot in the doubles rankings after a quarterfinal loss at the Dubai Championships and a round-of-32 exit at the Indian Wells Masters, but the semifinal win here will help the Indian regain the top spot when they are updated on Monday. —*AP*

Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden PHOTO: AFP

MIAMI OPEN 2024

'Perfect' Dimitrov Stuns Alcaraz

FLORIDA, 29 JAN

World number two Carlos Alcaraz was knocked out of the Miami Open quarter-finals on Thursday, beaten 6-2, 6-4 by Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov. Dimitrov played sparkling and energetic tennis to beat the Spanish top seed and will now face Germany's Alexander Zverev for a place in the final.

Germany's Zverev held off rising Hungarian Fabian Marozsan 6-3, 7-5 to book his place in the semis. Jannik Sinner and Daniil Medvedev will play in the other semi-final a rematch of the Australian Open final won by Sinner in January. The 20-year-old Alcaraz was aiming to match his Miami semi-final result from last year and become the first player to reach three consecutive semis in South Florida since Novak Djokovic in 2014-16.

The Bulgarian will next play against fourth-seed German Alexander Zverev in what will be his fourth semi-final of the season.

Dimitrov will return to the Top 10 for the first time since 2018 if he makes the Miami final. —*AP*

Carlos Alcaraz was knocked out of the Miami Open quarter-finals by Grigor Dimitrov PHOTO: AFP

INDIAN SUPER LEAGUE

BFC take on Odisha in a do-or-die encounter

SAPTARSHI
BENGALURU, 29 MARCH

Back home after international matches, Bengaluru Football Club or Bengaluru FC are all set to launch a renewed push for a change in momentum. BFC will host Odisha FC at Kanteerava Stadium on Saturday.

BFC are currently sitting 7th in the points table with 21 points in 19 matches. In contrast, Odisha are placed 4th with 35 points in 19 matches.

While BFC have to win all its remaining matches, Chennaiyin FC and Punjab FC need to drop points in their remaining games in order to qualify for the playoffs. The Blues suffered a defeat in their last match against FC Goa. Also, the agile Suresh Singh received a red card for his foul on Boris Singh Thangjam as the Blues were down to 10 men. So, the left-wing position is open as of now for the Blues.

Head coach of the Blues Gerard Zaragoza told Salar News, "We can start our playing 11 with Oliver Drost, Ryan Williams and Shivaldo Singh if not Sunil Chhetri." 'The man for the big saves' Gurpreet Singh Sandhu seems like the most obvious choice between the sticks, the coach told Salar News. Shivaldo pulled a goal back in the last quarter in a U-23 Indian friendly against Malaysia that happened in Kuala Lumpur Stadium.

Gerard Zaragoza and Defender Shivaldo Chingambam Singh attending a pre-match press conference at Sri Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru on Friday PHOTO: SALAR

- Back home after international matches, Bengaluru Football Club or Bengaluru FC are all set to launch a renewed push for a change in momentum. BFC will host Odisha FC at Kanteerava Stadium on Saturday.

"Today's match is the most important match for us in this season. It is as important as the final match. The most crucial thing for us is to play stable football and attack. I'm not putting any pressure on the players and not thinking about results. Moreover, the home crowd will be a big supporting factor for us," he said.

Zaragoza who was part of the ISL-winning 2018-19 squad signed a new deal in December 2023, until the end of the 2024-25 season.

These two teams have met 16 times across all competitions, in which BFC have won eight times whereas Odisha FC registered seven wins. The last meeting was in the Kalinga Super Cup which was won by Odisha. —*Salar News*

LEADERS REAL MADRID FACE ATHLETIC BILBAO

LONDON, 29 MARCH

La Liga leaders Real Madrid host Athletic Bilbao on Sunday as the Spanish top flight ramps up for an exciting end to the season. Madrid have a firm grip on the title race after shaking free of Catalan minnows Girona before the international break, but Ernesto Valverde's high-flying Athletic will be tricky opposition at the Santiago Bernabeu. The Basque side, in the Copa del Rey final, are fighting to secure a top-four finish and a return to Champions League football next season.

Athletic are fourth, a point clear of Diego Simeone's Atletico in fifth, who face Villarreal on Monday.

Madrid has a comfortable eight-point lead on champions Barcelona with nine matches remaining and if they can beat Athletic will be confident of holding on to claim a third title in five seasons.

The Catalans have found form in recent weeks after coach Xavi Hernandez said he would walk away at the end of the season, and face Las Palmas at home on Saturday. Barcelona are unbeaten in 10 matches and thumped Atletico 3-0 at the Metropolitano stadium in their last outing. —*AP*

Pankaj Advani, Causier storm into last 16

MUMBAI, 30 MARCH

World champion Pankaj Advani of India and David Causier of England recorded their third successive wins and stormed into the pre-quarterfinals of the All India CCI Billiards Classic 2024 here on Friday.

The Bengaluru-based Advani staved off a spirited challenge from Mumbai's talented cueist Raayan Razmi to pull off a 603-418 victory in a Group A match at the CCI's Wilson Jones billiards hall.

Advani started with a run of 235 and later compiled a break of 90 to secure the win, while Raayan made a 93 and followed it with a neat 124 to stay in the fight. Raayan with two wins also advanced to the pre-quarters.

The Englishman Causier, winner of multiple world titles, was on a roll and constructed substantial breaks of 203, 124, 160, 152, 162, 93, and 70 to tame Maharashtra number one Mahesh Jagdale by a massive 1168-418 margin in a Group C match.

Causier joined Advani and Raayan in the knockouts.

Earlier, world championship runner-up Sourav Kothari regained his winning touch as he outshone seasoned pro-Alok Kumar by scripting a convincing 889-200 point victory in a Group F match.

The Kolkata-based Kothari and Mumbai cueist Rohan Jambusaria qualified for the pre-quarterfinals from this group. —*PTI*

World champion Pankaj Advani PHOTO: PTI